

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



AUGUST 1985

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A New Mike Shayne Adventure
WILDE WEEKEND
by Brett Halliday

Suspenseful Novelets
by Jean Darling
and Mike Harris

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by New and Old Writers

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

WILDE WEEKEND

by Brett Halliday

She was an attractive woman, all right, and very tempting — but Shayne knew from past experience that some of the most alluring women could also be the deadliest 4

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Rebecca Wilde was about thirty, with a high forehead and prominent cheekbones — a beautiful woman who reminded Shayne of Lucy. She said her husband was trying to kill her. The detective said he was an investigator, not a bodyguard. “Doesn’t that depend on the body you have to guard?” she asked him. Shayne told her no, it didn’t — but even as he said it, he wasn’t sure it was true!

Wilde Weekend

by BRETT HALLIDAY

THE WOMAN HAD BEEN BEHEADED.

Mike Shayne stared in amazement. He had a sense of how Ichabod Crane must have felt on meeting the Headless Horseman. She was sitting there with her legs crossed, gesturing, but her head was missing.

“Reminds me of a Christmas turkey,” said a technician. “You lop off its head, but the body keeps moving for a while afterwards, like it has a life of its own.”

“How’s the effect done?” said the redhead.

The technician adjusted the monitor so that Shayne could hear her voice. “Chroma-key. Cinematographers call it blue matte. Essentially what happens is that the cameras are tuned to be blind to one color. In this case it’s green, the color of this mask we slipped over her head.”

“The way the KKK works,” said the redhead. “Put a white hood over their heads and they can’t see black.”

The technician put back on his headset with a smile. "You on next?"

Shayne checked his sweaty palms and dry mouth. For the tenth time in the last hour he cursed his secretary for talking him into this. While Lucy had gone to visit a friend in Naples, he had to spend his Friday night not at Hialeah or the boxing matches, but waiting to go on some local television talk show. But that was typical of how his weekends often went.

"It'll help the business," Lucy had said. "Your public has read so much about you in the *Daily News* columns that Tim Rourke has been doing on you. Now they'll be able to see you in person. Our business will double."

"I don't want our business to double," he answered. "I've already got twice the caseload I can handle."

"You'll love it. Oh, watch out for Rex Rhodes, the host. He's got the smile of a debutante, but the mouth of a shark." And with a kiss just brushed against the right corner of his mouth she had left him for the weekend.

A nondescript blonde whose pasty face suggested she worked all day indoors poked her head into the small, fluorescent-lighted office. "Mr. Shayne, we go to commercial in a few minutes. Have you been to make-up? You look like you could use a little blush."

"A little blush and I'll never be able to walk the streets of Miami without being followed by laughter," the detective answered with irritation.

"Suit yourself. I'm just the talent coordinator."

"If you want talent, you've got the wrong person. I can't carry a tune and I have trouble playing a kazoo."

"'Talent' in TV terminology refers to anybody who's on camera."

He followed her out of the stuffy room, wishing he hadn't run out of Camels. He thought of bumming a cigarette from her, but she'd have probably offered him a Virginia Slims. "Who's the headless talent out there now?"

"I'm sorry."

"The refugee from the French Revolution."

She stopped and turned. "Well, I suppose *you* wouldn't have heard of Rebecca Wilde."

"Who?"

"Judith Rossner, Mary Gordon — the names mean anything?"

"No."

"They're a regular *Who's Who* among women novelists."

"Sorry, I don't read novels."

She looked him over. "I doubt you even . . . I can believe that."

They stepped over some cables and stood beside a camera with a red light atop it.

"This camera's hot. Do you know what that means?" she said smugly.

"I doubt it's stolen."

"Bravo. It's on."

"Who's the skinny guy next to the famous woman novelist?" Shayne asked.

"You don't watch TV or movies either, do you?"

Shayne shook his head.

"He starred in his own TV series for a dozen years. Made a few movies. Usually portrays a strong, sensitive man, the prototypal male of the 80's."

"I thought I heard him say, 'I am a feminist' when I came in."

"His trademark. We go to commercial in thirty seconds. Wait here. As we come back, Rex will introduce you."

"I hear he has a nose for blood."

She peered over horn-rim glasses at him. "By the way, I'm not in the phone book."

"Not even the Yellow Pages?"

She frowned and walked on stage.

SHAYNE PEERED PAST THE AUDIENCE. STUDIO 3 LOOKED about the size of the dinner playhouse where Lucy liked to go. An audience of some 200 — mostly women — sat smiling and applauding. The APPLAUSE sign went off. They stopped and turned to each other. For the life of him, the redhead couldn't figure out what he was doing on a local TV show with a male feminist and a chicken with her head cut off.

"Miami's answer to Thomas Magnum, P.I.," he heard a voice say. "The man who's closed more cases than a Custom's inspector, Mike Shayne." An unseen hand shoved him on stage.

The lights were much brighter than he had thought, and he started to sweat immediately. Maybe he should have broken a cardinal rule and shaved for the second time today. At least Lucy wasn't here to see him make a fool of himself.

A firm hand pressed his and he found himself seated beside a man who looked larger in person than he seemed on the monitor. He had heard TV took ten pounds and ten years off a person's life. The host was living confirmation.

"My very good friend, Mike. How are you?"

"Fine, Rex," he said sitting down. Someone had clipped a mike on the lapel of his blue sports coat without his being aware of it.

"How long has it been, Mike?" said the TV personality.
Having never met the man, Shayne answered, "Too long."
"You know our other guests."

Shayne nodded. Up close he could see the woman's mask was green cheesecloth with green filters in the eye slits. She looked like a large bug.

"Mike, Rebecca was just objecting to the present male stereotype. She thinks that men today are no longer neanderthals who want to knock a woman over the head and carry her back to their cave. What do you think?"

"I am a feminist," interjected the star as though someone had pulled a string on his neck.

"I guess she's never walked the south Miami streets at night," said Shayne.

The audience tittered.

"That's just the kind of comment I would expect from a square-jawed, muscle-bound hulk like you," interrupted the green mask.

"How do you respond to that, Mike?" said the host.

"I think I've just been stereotyped, Rex."

The TV-movie star looked like he couldn't decide whether to faint or fall over in laughter.

"The ball's in your court, Rebecca," said the host.

"Another sexist metaphor," said the woman.

"Chris Evert-Lloyd will be surprised to hear she failed her saliva test," said Shayne matter-of-factly.

The TV-movie star opted for laughter, as did the audience.

Shayne had the feeling he had been set up. He had heard the host had a reputation for being an *agent provocateur*.

When Rex Rhodes turned back from the crowd, he found the redhead's steel-gray eyes were aimed at his forehead like the twin barrels of a shotgun. The detective watched the momentary bulge of his host's adam's apple till it seemed the size of the knot in his madras tie.

"But seriously, folks," said Rhodes slowly, "I didn't bring my good friend on the show for a Shana Alexander-James Kilpatrick face-off. There have been a lot of misconceptions about the private eye, myths that go back to Sherlock Holmes. Is there anybody in the audience who'd like to ask Mike a question about his profession?"

"I have one," said the woman in the green mask.

Being unable to see her eyes, Shayne felt uneasy. "Shoot," he said.

"Have you ever had a case so difficult that even your huge masculine ego had to admit defeat?"

"Sure," admitted the redhead. "Now I'd like to ask a question. Am

I the only one here who thinks it a little strange to be talking with a woman with a green hood over her head?"

"I get that all the time," she answered. "You see I'm a very private person. I like to go out to eat, to walk through department stores without people constantly stopping me to ask . . . "

"Say, aren't you the Green Hornet?" interrupted the TV star. Then he doubled over, his laughter climbing from a guffaw to a cackle.

The male feminist was also an ass, decided the redhead.

Rex Rhodes said, "What I see here is the beginning of a dialogue. Two people coming at life from opposite directions . . . wait a minute. I've got this terrific idea." With his left hand he took the woman's palm and with his right grabbed Shayne's jacket. "Why don't you two wonderful people spend the weekend together, then come back in a week and tell us what kind of a rapport you were able to establish?"

Shayne would rather have parachuted naked into the Everglades on a dark night, but having heard the woman's testimony to privacy he wasn't worried.

Shock arrived in the form of a soft, feminine voice from beneath the hood that said, "Rex, you are right. It is a terrific idea."

II

SHAYNE FOUND HIMSELF BEING PULLED IN OPPOSITE directions. On one hand, the whole situation was ridiculous, but on the other was her tone. Something in it, muffled slightly as it was, alerted the redhead's senses. A few short words had suggested a vulnerability, a core of fear beneath the liberated, self-assured exterior.

And he was slightly intrigued.

Still, he could hear his good friend, Tim Rourke, the reporter for the Miami *Daily News*, commenting on this one. "You mean, shamus, your date *came* with a bag over her head. I mean, I've heard of two baggers before — she's so ugly that you *both* have to wear bags over your heads — but this is ridiculous."

"Well, Mike," pressed Rhodes, his gleaming teeth putting a shark to shame, "what do you think? Is it possible for two people from opposite walks of life to get off on the right foot?"

"It's a little late for that," said Rebecca Wilde.

"Perhaps," interrupted the TV star, "Ms. Wilde would permit me to substitute for our reluctant detective. After all, I am a . . . "

The green-hooded figure said, "That would be two feminists at the same table, and you know what people think when they see two bra-burners huddled over hot coffee together?"

The audience tittered without the APPLAUSE sign coming on.

"Mike?" said the host. "Old friend?"

The redhead rasped his left thumbnail across the stubble on his chin.
"Why not."

Rhodes beamed brighter than a klieg light. "Well, there you have it, folks. Miami's answer to the odd couple. Can a feminist novelist find happiness with the Magic City's resident macho — and bachelor? Eat your heart out, Jim Lange and the rest of *The Dating Game* staff, and the rest of you tune in next week to find out what happens."

As the show's credits came up on the monitor, Shayne still couldn't believe what had happened. Well, he had learned to live with his quick combat decisions. How difficult was this going to be? While everybody trooped by to shake his hand, he noticed her standing off-stage, her head darting around as if looking for someone.

Shayne separated himself from the crowd and caught up with her in front of an unused color camera. He gently touched her on the elbow.

A muffled scream came from beneath the mask as she turned, and he could feel her muscles tense.

"We don't really have to go through with this," he said.

"Wait for me in the lobby," she said. "I want to ditch this mask."

"Fine," said the investigator, "but how'll I know you?"

"You won't."

SHE WAS WRONG. HE HAD BEEN SITTING IN THE LOBBY OF the station for fifteen minutes and was already on the second butt from a new pack of Camels. The clothes were different and the hood was gone, but he was certain it was her.

Rourke would have been wrong, too. Brunette, about thirty, with a high forehead and prominent cheekbones, she reminded him somewhat of Lucy — a beautiful woman. But the way she walked and carried herself beneath the high-shouldered red dress were dead give-aways that she was the woman in the green hood.

She glanced over her shoulder toward the elevators from where she had come. She must have seen him start to rise and stub out his cigarette, but she kept going.

Shayne stood there, his hands in his pocket, feeling quite foolish, like a teenager who had been stood up on his first date.

She glanced back across the lobby again. The elevator doors opened. A bald man in a madras sport coat emerged. Her head snapped forward and her pace quickened. The man broke into a trot.

What in hell was going on? Shayne wondered.

She passed through the front door, past an old guard who seemed more dead than alive, and hurried into the Miami night.

The bald man shoved the guard aside as he followed her.
To exit Shayne had to leap over the rising guard.

The night air felt warm and stifling after the cold air conditioning of the studio. The redhead heard quick footsteps to his right and took off sprinting. Mercury lights cast angular shadows across the nearly deserted parking lot.

She was headed for one of the few cars in the lot, a white Thunderbird. The bald man paused and reached beneath his madras jacket.

Shayne caught him just behind the kneecaps. A clear case of clipping, decided the redhead, but if the rules held up, this creep wouldn't have been chasing her.

The investigator rolled up. The bald man got up slowly to his feet and held up both hands as if to say "STOP." Shayne hit him twice anyway. The first punch lifted the figure up. The second dropped him to the still warm pavement.

The Thunderbird came roaring toward them.

Shayne saw her face, a delicate white moon in an alien solar system. Was she going to run him over?

Her car swerved to the side.

Her voice broke as she said, "Get in."

A FULL GLASS OF WHITE WINE SAT ACROSS FROM AN empty brandy snifter. In the distance a band played "Moon Over Miami," and a few couples danced languidly, more like shadows than human beings. Normally Shayne hated the bar at the Fontainebleau, but it was the kind of place at which she seemed to belong, public and classy, and above all else he wanted her to feel comfortable.

"You don't like chablis?" he said. The moment she had picked him up, she had slid over to the passenger's seat. The invitation was unmistakable — take care of me. So far he didn't know if he had.

"I'm sorry. I'm usually much better company," she answered. "Before you showed up on Rex's program, I was a regular chatterbox."

Shayne smiled warmly as he signaled a waiter to bring him another Martell. "Do you want to tell me what's happened?"

"That bald man? I swear, before tonight I had never seen him."

"Do you know what he wanted?"

"Only my picture, I hope. I understand the scandal sheets are offering a fortune for a glossy of Rebecca Wilde *sans masque*." She reached into her purse and came out with a hardback, *Crises of the Gender*.

"Is this one of them?" he said.

"One of what?"

"A crisis of your gender."

"Maybe." She flipped the book over. "Note there's no picture."

Shayne set fire to another Camel. "Why do you go through this elaborate charade with the green mask?"

"You mean the 'Is she in heaven/Is she in hell?/That damned elusive/Rebecca Wilde belle'bit?"

"Yeah."

"My publisher loves money. My books have sold well in the past. If I go on a junket or two, they will sell well again, and Conley will make more money. Ergo, *Rex Rhodes' Roundtable*. I was forced." She sipped her wine. "Why did you go on?"

"I was tricked."

"By whom?"

"A formerly close friend." He inhaled the harsh smoke deeply. "Tell me, how did a women's novelist ever get a name like Rebecca Wilde?"

"It's the pen name I started with. When I decided to change the direction of my life, I began by writing something else."

"Bodice-rippers," said Shayne, remembering the piles of paperbacks that used to sit on Lucy's desk, "the ones with 'passion' or 'lust' in the title and the half-naked women on the covers."

"Somehow, Mr. Shayne, you don't impress me as a man who reads romances."

"I'm not. It's the half-naked women on the covers."

"That figures. What did Rex call you — macho?"

"That's his label, not mine."

"Tell me, do you think there's a war between the sexes going on?"

"Out there or in here?" Shayne took the new snifter from the waiter. "A minor skirmish or two, but not a war."

"Did you really mean that crack about my not having been in south Miami to see the neanderthals?"

"Yeah. That's one of the reasons I don't read non-fiction. Too little reality, too little practicality in it."

"Oh?"

"You could have avoided that little crisis back there at channel 28 just by not running."

"Maybe I didn't want to," she said smugly.

"Sounds like the premise for another best-selling book, winning by running, but we're not getting anywhere. I'm interested in the big one. Why did you agree to spend more time with me? I mean, there are other ways to ditch Mr. I-am-a-feminist."

She rolled the thin wine glass between long fingers. The reflection of

her face kept appearing and reappearing in it. "It's my husband — excuse me, my ex-husband. I'm afraid he wants to kill me."

III

SHE THREW THE WINE DOWN HER THROAT AS THOUGH the long-stemmed crystal were a shotglass of tequila. Hastily she motioned to a nearby waiter for another.

Shayne chose his words carefully. "I think we'd better back up for a second. I didn't even know you had been married."

"I was . . . I am."

"Marriage is like pregnancy — you are or you aren't."

She reached across the table and grabbed a Camel from the pack lying beside his arm. Her long fingers fumbled with a house matchbox. Shayne struck a match and held it steady for her.

Thanks," she said. "You see, Phil and I aren't really divorced, but as far as I'm concerned we're not really married."

"You are still *legally* married."

"I suppose so, unless Phil went to Mexico or Haiti, which I strongly doubt."

"Why?"

"His so-called religious convictions, at least as far as getting a divorce is concerned."

The detective had the distinct feeling of seeing only the tip of a very large iceberg. "How long have you and Phil . . . been apart?"

"Ten glorious years going on eleven." She choked on the smoke and began to cough.

"A what they call 'less-than-amiable' parting?"

"You do have a way with understatement. How can I put this nicely? I can't. Phil wasn't, isn't a very nice person."

"Why exactly did you leave him for, what did you call it, a new beginning?"

"Nowadays the name for it is the battered wife syndrome. Back then, he just beat the hell out of me. Oh sure, nobody ever knew about his other life as a . . . neanderthal. The whole world thought Phil was Mr. Clean, the upstanding pillar of Bel Air."

"L.A.?"

She flicked off an extra-long ash. "You don't read books. Do you ever watch TV?"

"Mostly sports."

"Somehow I knew it wasn't *Firing Line*. Anyway, do you remember a medical show that ran in the 70's on ABC, a Tuesday night, prime-time gem, *David Galen, M.D.*? Well, Phil played the handsome, but

highly professional inner-city doctor. The answer to every patient's dream. Tough, but caring. Brilliant, but down-to-earth. At least that's how the network promos read. My God, the man supposedly even made housecalls in the ghetto." She drew deeply on the unfiltered cigarette. "I have a sneaking suspicion that the people who used to write to Dr. David for medical advice are the same ones who were convinced that Nixon had nothing to do with the Watergate break-in."

Shayne stifled a chuckle.

"You know the height of absurdity came when they actually did location shots for the sympathetic Dr. Galen in our very house. The same simple quarter-of-a-million-dollar bungalow that he used as a boxing ring at night." She tapped her chest with both hands. "Well, let me tell you, this old body had more sense than faithful Nurse Jill Petit, who stayed with the good doctor for three seasons."

"If he beat you, why didn't you go to the police?"

"Pardon me if I laugh, but that sounds like a male response. Don't you think I tried?" She gulped the wine. "Who was going to believe that the only M.D. more perfect than Dr. Welby had a secret life? Do you know that bastard had the nerve at cocktail parties to confide to his circle of very close friends that poor Becca drinks a lot, but he's learned to bear up under it?"

"Do you?"

"There's not a drop of truth to the story." She laughed at her own joke. "Of course I drank. What would you do if somebody was beating you?"

"Get out."

"I did." Her head tilted back and her eyes swung upward. "Not that he did all the time, mind you. Just when the ratings went down. I'll bet all these years he's been telling everybody that I've been drying out somewhere. Probably believes it, too."

SHAYNE WAS INTERESTED. THAT WAS THE FASCINATING part about his line of work. One minute they were strangers, and the next they were pouring their hearts out to him. "It's a shame, Michael me boy," Tim Rourke had often said to him, "that a good Irish lad like yourself didn't become a man of the cloth." In a way, decided the redhead, he had. "What made you finally decide to leave him?"

"Trish."

"Trish?"

"My daughter. I didn't think she knew about it. I mean, she was only six. One night the three of us, she and I and her Barbie, were sitting there watching Dr. Galen hold the hand of another distraught female

patient on the tube when she suddenly threw her doll at the screen and started shouting 'I hate you, I hate you.' I asked her why, and my very innocent, six-year-old daughter said, 'Because during the next commercial he's going to hit her.' The next day when Phil went to the studio, I packed us each a bag and took the bus out of L.A."

"Where'd you go?"

"Everywhere and nowhere. I wandered from town to town. I'd married Phil when I was seventeen and had never done anything but be Mrs. Craddock. So I took whatever work I could find."

"Did he come after you?"

"That's why I moved from place to place. So he couldn't trace me."

"Why Miami?"

"I happened to get off the Greyhound. This seemed like the perfect place to hide. With all the immigrants, the people coming and going on vacations, it was easy to remain anonymous."

Shayne watched the movement of her thick lips, seeing pain as much as the light cherry lipstick, but sensing something deeper about her.

"How'd you get started as a writer?"

"Frustration. You get up at 6:00 every day, drop your daughter off at school, work a nowhere job, come home to watch TV, and fall asleep. Then the whole routine starts again. One night Trish and I were walking through a mall and I picked up a paperback romance — it seemed better than reruns on the tube. And you know what I found? That book and others like it were glamorized reruns of my life."

She grew more enthusiastic and her face seemed to glow through the light makeup. "I was working as a secretary for a bailbondsman downtown. During slow days I began pecking away, and after a few months I had a novel. Well, it wasn't great, but when I sent it to New York, some woman thought it looked promising. Flo took me under her wing."

"And the rest is literary history."

"Well, maybe not literary," she smiled.

Shayne swished the Martell around the snifter. "You weren't telling me the truth about the mask a while ago, were you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You don't wear that thing to keep frantic fans from interrupting your quiet dinner at Chez Nous. And the reason your picture's not on *Crises of the Gender* is your husband. You still don't want him to find out where you are."

"I am impressed. Rhodes was at least half-right. You are a good detective."

"Should I be half-hurt?"

"Why?"

"That doesn't say much about my macho quotient."

A smile again turned up the edges on her moist mouth. She leaned forward, her dress gathering at its scoop neck, and he caught a whiff of jasmine perfume.

"I'll reserve judgement on that," she said.

Shayne changed the subject. "Where's your daughter now?"

"Fields Academy."

"The private school up in Boca. Your books must sell well."

"About two years ago with me on the road a lot promoting my books, attending conferences, we started getting on each other's nerves. She was fourteen, rebellious. We mutually decided it might be better for her to try a new surrounding. I want the best for Trish. All that I didn't have."

"What about a father?"

"Trish really never knew Phil. He was gone most of the time, and when he came home — well, she's shut that out of her mind."

SHAYNE FINISHED THE BRANDY. IN A CROWD OF STRANGERS he would never have picked her out as having a family life. She seemed more the beautiful woman who came to life in the midst of a Chanel No. 5 ad. But, as much as she filled his senses, one logical problem in her story stood out. "Tell me something. If the last decade you've hidden from your husband, what makes you think he wants to kill you?"

"I got a call this morning at the condo. It was Phil. He's in town and he said he had to see me."

"The bald-headed man in the madras coat earlier. I know Hollywood does a lot with makeup, but that wasn't Phil."

"No, Phil's still got his Dr. Galen good looks. About two months ago I saw him on the 6:00 news. What he was doing at a White House dinner I'll never know, but Phil was always good at . . . house calls." She laughed nervously.

"What makes you think he wants to kill you?"

"His tone. It's the same tone he used every time he threw me against the kitchen wall."

Shayne felt like he had been circled long enough. Soon the strike would come — unless he beat her to it. "What do you want from me?"

"Protection."

"I'm an investigator, not a bodyguard."

"The way we've talked, you're more than that. You know, you're the first man who's listened to me more than five minutes without asking for my autograph or sign."

"Thanks for the compliment, but I'm still no bodyguard."

"Doesn't that depend on the body you have to guard?"

"No."

"Are you a friend?"

"Yeah, I guess."

"O.K., friend, I agreed to meet with Phil at 9:00 tomorrow in public. The Center for the Fine Arts. Would you care to come with me? I'd feel better if I didn't have to go alone."

With Lucy gone he had planned to drive down to the Keys for some snorkeling and Mexican beer. But, he told himself, her request couldn't take more than an hour of his time. She had poured her heart out, and he supposed that had imposed some obligation on him.

In truth, though, he had to admit she interested him — as a woman. "Why not," he answered.

"Terrific. This calls for a celebration. Wait here for a minute."

She pushed back her chair and walked away, trailing jasmine and stares behind her. Her body had an athletic sexiness about it rather than an artificial slink.

He pried his mind loose from the tangle of emotions. For all her story he knew little about the woman named Rebecca Wilde. Sort of like trying to judge a paperback from the publisher's blurb.

Still he knew there were chapters in there he wanted to read.

He felt a warm hand on his shoulder. He looked up. She smiled down. "Hold out your hand."

Not knowing why, he did.

She stuck something hard in it and said, "Give me ten minutes."

He opened his hand.

It was a key to the hotel's room 211.

IV

SHAYNE LOOKED BACK INTO HER DEEP GREEN EYES. HE could feel the magnetism. All his reasoning couldn't deny the pull of his senses to this woman.

And she wasn't just sexually alluring. Rebecca Wilde was a complex person with more than a body to fascinate men. In a sense, given her perspective on the male gender, what she was offering must have been difficult. Something rare, not given to any man.

And a few hours ago they had been at each other's throats.

"Well," she said, "don't tell me that beneath the veneer of caring, you're like the rest of them."

"Rest?"

"You have to be the aggressor or you don't want to play. I thought

you were different."

What was happening wasn't something he had gone looking for, the investigator told himself as he stood up. "Let's go for a walk outside. I think we both need to clear our heads."

The warm night air lifted her hair and rustled it across her forehead. The light scent of her drifted into his senses. He was suddenly aware she had slipped her hand into his. "Great idea to come out here." She faced him. "I can't tell you how great I feel this moment about me, about you, about us."

Nobody had to tell the detective things weren't going exactly as he had planned. Neither his head nor hers seemed to be clearing. In the quarter-moonlight she looked even more appealing than she had in the restaurant. "I hope this evening isn't just research for your next book," he tried.

She smiled and slipped her arms around his neck. Before he knew it she was kissing him full on the mouth.

He didn't resist.

Having found what lay behind the green mask, he had to know more.

SHAYNE GOT OUT OF THE THUNDERBIRD AND ZIG-zagged across the just-crowding street to the TV station's parking lot. The early-morning sun perched atop a row of royal palms like a contented hen. He slid into the Buick and used his electric razor to knock off the stubble.

Yawning, he checked his watch. He still had time to throw down some steak and eggs before meeting her at the Center by 9:00. He had turned down her last invitation, for breakfast. He needed time to pull things together.

A thin line always stretched between his just being concerned about a client and getting too close to remain professional. Last night, maybe he had crossed over too far.

BY 8:55 THE SUN HAD REACHED THE TOP OF THE LOW buildings surrounding the newly-opened CFA. Beads of perspiration formed beneath his sports coat. Saturday promised to be a scorcher.

Where was Rebecca? Had she developed second thoughts? Had she panicked and run again?

Domestic cases were usually the most difficult to read. With hardened criminals you could pretty much figure what they were going to do in any situation, and somebody always had something to sell about them to help you along your way. But in cases like this you had to play it totally by ear. And without help. Husbands and wives, especially

ex's, were their own worst enemies.

Maybe that was why since Phyllis' death those years ago he had been hesitant — hell, he had outright refused — to make a commitment to any woman.

Lucy had seemed to understand that. What would he say to his beautiful secretary when she returned tomorrow? What was there to say? She knew how he felt. No handcuffs bound them together, visible or invisible.

He heard Rebecca coming before he spotted her. Above the din of the traffic heels clicked against the concrete courtyard in military precision. In a tan suit — buttoned up all the way — and a high-necked, chocolate-brown blouse, she created a different appearance from that of the night before. Hair that had been loose a few hours earlier was bound tightly in a knot. At her side her leather handbag swung weapon-like. The lady, as Shula would say, had on her game face.

"I was getting a little worried," the redhead said, fingering his Seiko.

"Is he here yet?"

Her tone was totally mechanical. Maybe she was steeling herself for an encounter she had spent the last decade trying to avoid. Or, maybe she had second thoughts about last night. "I wouldn't know him if I saw him."

"That's right. The only thing you watch on television is the Super-Bowl."

Shayne fired up the second Camel of the day. "Have you reconsidered what we talked about last night?"

"We talked about a lot."

"The police."

"I told you I've got to keep this thing quiet." She glanced around furtively. "You remember that creep in the madras coat? When you hit him, I'm sure he was reaching into his pocket for a camera. He's freelance, sells his garbage to those scandal rags. All I need right now is fifty million readers opening up a tabloid to a headline QUEEN OF ROMANCE REALLY BATTERED WIFE. I could take the heat, but it's not fair to Trish. Besides, if the L.A. police didn't believe me, why should the M.P.D.? It's just not worth the chance."

A black limousine slid up to a NO PARKING sign. A dark-suited figure leapt out of the front seat and opened the rear door. As a white suit emerged, another dark suit flanked him on the opposite side.

"The S.O.B. makes an entrance," she said, her voice betraying a slight quiver.

"Does he always travel with beef bookends?"

"He needs something to keep that overblown ego of his from top-

pling to the pavement. But, when you make one, maybe two B movies a year, you don't really have to worry about being mobbed by hysterical fans."

Shayne studied the tall man's approach. A gust of wind, not following the script, shifted a very expensive rug to the side of his head.

"Hello, Rebecca," he said.

"Philip."

"Who's the redheaded beefcake? The latest chapter in the life of Rebecca Wilde?"

"Never mind him. How did you find me?"

"How's not important. I did."

"Then what do you want?"

"You, of course."

"What's a matter? Did you run out of punching bags in L.A.?"

"Let's be adult about this."

"My God," she said, half-turning to Shayne, "he spends our entire marriage acting like a spoiled child, and he wants me to be an adult."

"I'm not the same as I was. I've changed."

"Does that mean you have a right cross to go with your left jab?"

He reached out and grabbed her by the arm.

She jumped back and a soft cry escaped her lips.

Shayne stiffened.

The dark suits took a step closer to Craddock.

"Are you so afraid of me," she said, quickly regaining her composure, "that you need Mr. Hyde and the Wolfman to protect you?"

"Rebecca?" said the redhead.

"Excuse me, dear," said Craddock, "but I think your pet needs to be curbed."

SHAYNE DIDN'T REALIZE IT HAD HAPPENED UNTIL HIS closed right hand caught Phil Craddock on the edge of his chin, knocking him back like a well-struck headpin.

"Oh, my God," screamed the man in the white suit. "My plastic surgery is ruined."

"No, Shayne," she said.

It was too late. While the Wolfman picked up his employer, Mr. Hyde charged across the open space. The redhead ducked the first punch and hit him quickly in the stomach. It had no effect.

His antagonist brought his head down and butted the detective.

Shayne fell backward, a miniature light show exploding above his left eye.

A steel toe caught him on the right shoulder and he rolled over.

"Stop this," screamed Rebecca Wilde.

Two arms reached around the redhead's neck as he got to one knee. Suddenly he was without air.

Gasping, he reached up, grabbed the attacker's hair, and rolled forward.

Surprise worked as the figure released him.

Out of the corner of his eye, Shayne saw the leather shoe playing a return engagement.

He snapped his head back.

As the foot whistled harmlessly by, he punched up.

The man doubled over and grabbed his groin.

Shayne flipped his elbow up.

Mr. Hyde's jaw was going to need plastic surgery.

The detective rose and punched him in the tip of his nose. Maybe the surgeon was having a two-for-one sale.

The detective whirled around. The remaining bodyguard was reaching into his jacket.

Shayne didn't wait to see what the man pulled out.

A front kick caught the Wolfman squarely in the solar plexus.

The redhead stepped in and hit him twice in the jaw.

Once more in the gut.

Then a knee to the chin.

Rebecca Wilde sobbed.

Phil Craddock coughed. "I'm going to have you back and our daughter, too."

"Not me, not Trish," said the woman. "Never."

The white suit held his jaw in a handkerchief. "Why don't we see what *she* wants."

"She's out of your life for good, you bastard," said Rebecca Wilde.

Craddock stood up. "Let's ask her. Come drive with me up to Fields Academy."

She began to shriek. "You know that, too."

As Shayne turned toward her, he looked over her shoulder.

Steadying a camera atop a trash can was the man in the madras jacket.

V

"OVER THERE," SAID THE DETECTIVE. "I THINK WE'RE ON *Candid Camera*."

"Get that film," screamed Rebecca Wilde. "You've got to stop him."

"Walt, Don," slurred Craddock, still holding his jaw, "I want that

peeping Tom."

Blood streaming from his nostrils, the bodyguard called Walt tried to pick up his companion, who was rolling on the concrete and moaning.

Shayne hesitated. Which was more important? The camera or Rebecca?

"Please," she urged in the midst of her hysteria, "I can't have the publicity, not now."

Should he leave her alone, the redhead pondered, or worse, with her ex-husband?

The madras coat, suddenly aware he had been spotted, bolted around the corner of the CFA museum.

Walt and Don hobbled after him.

The detective took off, the leather soles of his loafers slipping on the smooth concrete. As he rounded the corner of the building, he passed the Bruise Brothers, who were already panting. They seemed ready for a refresher course at bodyguard school.

Shayne caught sight of the bald man weaving in and out of the pedestrians who now filled the sidewalks. If he didn't miss his guess, the photographer had a car parked nearby. The detective had to catch him quickly or Rebecca's nightmare headline could soon be reality.

The madras coat crossed a parking lot. The waves of heat off the dark tarmac caused his coat to shimmer, distorting the fleeing figure into slivers of a rainbow.

Shayne rubbed his hand across his eyes and glanced over his shoulder. Humpty and Dumpty had fallen even farther back.

The bald man cut through a group of Japanese tourists. Had they collided, Shayne decided he could have spent the rest of his life trying to find which camera belonged to the madras coat.

The photographer yanked open a steel door a few yards down a narrow alley and disappeared into a building.

Shayne followed beneath a sign reading BACON'S.

The sudden darkness caused the redhead to hesitate as his pupils dilated. He was standing in a crowded storage area. Boxes and crates of what looked like a mixture of toys and sporting goods loomed around him. Everything but a madras coat.

Shayne moved quickly across the room and through a half-opened door.

He was surrounded by mannequins in negligees and other intimate apparel.

"Welcome to the Le Chic Shoppe," said a low-pitched female voice who pronounced *shoppe* as if it had two syllables.

Shayne looked over at a heavy-set matron in a blue sack dress high-

lighted by a plastic badge reading MS. ZELLMAN.

"Excuse me," said the detective. He leapt onto the glass counter filled with bra-ed upper torsos.

"Sir!" she said.

Shayne scampered atop a shelf of slips behind the counter.

"We do not carry mountain-climbing gear," she screamed.

The detective looked down from his ledge momentarily. "I've got to find my wife. She's pregnant and due any minute."

"Oh dear," said Ms. Zellman, "but I'm afraid you're in the wrong department. Buying one of our 'Afternoon Delite' peignoirs at this stage of the game is a little like closing the barn door after the horse is out, if you catch my meaning." She tittered.

Shayne hurtled to the floor. A bald head was bobbing out the front door.

He followed, trying his best not to bump into Bacon's customers.

A blast of heat and a traffic jam welcomed him to the pavement. Up ahead his quarry was trying to cross the street. The photog had slowed down noticeably. At least he was in better shape than the Bruise Brothers.

The madras coat looked back. His foot caught the curb, sending him sprawling into a startled woman carrying an armload of packages.

Shayne drew closer.

The photog spotted him.

Shayne could see the panic in his eyes.

The bald man jumped to his feet and ran down the concrete block.

Shayne closed the distance.

Baldy turned into an alley.

The redhead followed.

Except for two weeks worth of garbage waiting for the strike to end, they were alone. The photog pulled a small camera from inside his coat. Ripping it open, he held up a Tootsie Roll-sized film. "One step closer, buddy, and I'll bite the bullet."

"Easy, pal," said Shayne. "I don't want you, just the film."

"I mean it," said the madras coat, lifting the film to his lips like a snack he was about to pop into his mouth.

"No you don't," said the redhead, stepping forward. "Nobody's stupid enough to do that."

The photog was.

Shayne rushed forward.

The bald man began to sweat and choke.

The detective spun him like a top, then grabbed him around the chest. Placing his interlocked knuckles beneath the gasping figure's rib

cage, he began to squeeze.

The Heimlich Maneuver panicked the bald man. He began to writhe, an inhuman sound escaping from his lips.

"Hold it!" commanded a loud voice from the mouth of the alley.

Shayne looked up to see two uniformed cops, their .38's leveled in his direction.

VI

WHEN SHAYNE ROUNDED THE CORNER OF THE CFA, HE found himself in an almost deserted courtyard. Quickly his steel-gray eyes surveyed the area. A few shoppers, a couple of businessmen not taking the weekend off, a kid on a skateboard locked in his Walkman world.

But no Craddock, no Bruise Brothers, no Rebecca.

Then he spotted the limo. It had moved from the NO PARKING zone to a slot a hundred yards up the street.

Shayne broke across the pavement. Within seconds he was beside the long, black Caddy.

His muscles tensed. Through the tinted glass he saw Craddock and Rebecca as close as two teenagers in the backseat of the old man's Chevy at a June twilight double-feature. They were obviously engaged in a very private conversation. Shayne sensed none of the venom that had been injected into their earlier encounter.

The woman looked up. Seeing the detective, she said something to Craddock, who flipped a switch in the door. The window slid down smoothly.

"Did you get the film?" Rebecca Wilde asked eagerly.

"No," said Shayne.

"Damn," she said, glancing at Craddock. "What happened?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," said the redhead, the image of the photog's beet-colored face still fresh in his mind. No, thought the redhead, he hadn't gotten the film. The bald cameraman had successfully dropped the evidence down his gullet. But the effort had made him pass out. The detective had flashed his I.D. to the cops and fed them a story about his friend's having swallowed some foreign object while they were arguing over the Dolphins' upcoming game. When the ambulance arrived, Shayne thanked the paramedic when the young man assured the detective that as soon as they reached Miami Mercy his friend would receive a stomach x-ray. "But I took care of it," he added.

"Never mind, Becca," said Craddock. "Pretty soon we'll be back

home and all this will be behind us."

Shayne watched as Craddock slipped his hand over Rebecca's and the woman who had earlier called him a bastard smiled. A vice momentarily closed in the redhead's stomach. What in hell was going on?

SHAYNE PULLED OFF I-95 NORTH AT THE HILLSBOROUGH interchange in Boca Raton. A car length in front, the black limo turned left. The redhead still couldn't believe the situation, especially when Rebecca Wilde had leaned forward and said, "Would you mind following us up to Fields? Phil and I have some things to discuss."

The woman in the car ahead was not the same person he had known before. Either at the TV station or later. It didn't make sense. How could she in total anger call her husband, ex or otherwise, an S.O.B. one moment and then in the next act like a calm, subservient mate? Did the actor really have a mega-dose of what the publicity mills called charisma?

And, if they were really getting along so well, why had she wanted him to tag along? He was about as useful as a spare tire for a cabin cruiser. And for that matter, why had he gone along? Which was stronger, his investment in time and energy, his curiosity, or his emotional involvement?

He broke open a pack of the new Camels. Filtered. During the week everything worked with clock-like precision. Check into the office at 8:30, read through the mail, write up progress reports, talk to new clients. Stability through regularity. But damn the weekends. On one hand he got away from the drudgery of routine — on the other, Saturday and Sunday always brought an unsettling uncertainty. When else would he be trying filtered cigarettes?

Fields Academy, Shayne recalled, was the former estate of P.D. Fields, the financier who had helped Henry Flagler develop so much of South Florida. Stretched across twenty acres, it sat like an oasis in the sprawl of shopping centers and condos that radiated from the ocean. They drove through iron gates, up a winding and palm-lined driveway, and parked in a complex of stonehouses tied together by roofed walkways.

Scanning the turn-of-the-century home, Shayne admitted to himself that part of the problem was his passivity, his sense of being along merely for the ride.

"Since this is Saturday, Trish has a field hockey game this morning," Rebecca announced. "It should be getting over about now."

What a strange delegation, Shayne thought as they passed between

two buildings. Like a native guide Rebecca Wilde had the point, followed by Craddock, the great white hunter, and their three bearers — him, Humpty, and Dumpty. The redhead knew that Craddock must have instructed his bodyguards not to start anything, but nonetheless he could feel their dull eyes on his back. Before this was over, he feared, he was going to have another workout.

They passed some clay tennis courts occupied by young girls in all-white outfits and all-dark tans. Was this place a prep school or a resort, the detective wondered.

A sparse crowd of a few adults and mostly young girls surrounded the playing field. On it the girls in plaid kilts and short-sleeve white blouses seemed to be moving in slow motion. Maybe in prep field hockey circles it was against the rules to sweat.

"That's Trish in goal," Rebecca announced.

Shayne spotted the tall girl in front of the crease immediately. She seemed more physical than her teammates, and in the things she shouted at the other girls, Shayne sensed a confidence, a command of the situation. Unlike the others, too, her stick moved fluidly. A born athlete.

"I've only been here a few times," Rebecca Wilde announced, "and for the life of me I don't realize what's going on."

"Sort of like a croquet game gone mad," said the redhead.

Craddock laughed.

In a few minutes a whistle blew. The girls looked relieved. Mechanically they shook each other's hands without looking in their opponents' faces.

The tall girl, suddenly spotting them, broke into a run. A smile formed on her tired face. Three feet from the entourage she stopped dead and dropped her stick.

"Daddy?" she said tentatively.

Phil Craddock held out his hands. "Trish. So my little girl's not so little any more."

She leaped into his arms and squeezed him. Her feet came off the ground. Tears began to drip from her eyes. "I'm so happy to see you I'm not even mad."

"At what?" said Craddock.

"That you called me not-so-little. Most people ask me how's the weather up here. That's right before they end up with a hockey stick between their ears."

Father and daughter laughed in unison.

Shayne noticed that through this whole scene Trish Craddock had not acknowledged her mother's presence, his, or that of the brothers

grim. Nor had Rebecca made any overtures to her daughter. He felt as if he were standing in the middle of a what's-wrong-with-this picture.

"Trish," said Rebecca, moving toward the hugging pair.

"Oh, Daddy, you're even more handsome than in the reruns of *David Galen, M.D.*"

"Trish," said Rebecca.

"Daddy, it's just like you said it would be."

"Trish, what's going on?" said her mother.

Craddock said, "Don't you recognize a family reunion when you see one?"

In a split second Rebecca Wilde's composure came apart. "What are you talking about?"

Phil Craddock smiled over his daughter's shoulder.

Trish said, "This is the first time I've actually seen him, but for the last two years every Sunday night we've been talking on the phone."

VII

THAT HALF-SOLVED THE MYSTERY OF HOW PHIL CRADDOCK had found Rebecca, Shayne decided.

"You what?" said Rebecca.

"That's right, Mother. I did something on my own. Isn't that what you wanted?"

Shayne could feel the saw-toothed edge of Trish's words slice into Rebecca, and he could see her starting to bleed. He felt like a helpless spectator watching a contest whose outcome he could do nothing about. Only this wasn't the Orange Bowl.

Trish pulled herself even closer to her father. "A couple of years ago I was studying with the tube on as usual. David Letterman was doing a salute to 70's TV. And right there between Cindy Williams and David Soul was Daddy. Anyway, I took a chance and called NBC. They referred me to his old network. ABC had a number for his agency. A secretary there said she'd call him. When he didn't phone, I called back."

"Really, honey, it was quite a shock," inserted Craddock.

"I thought it might be, so I pleaded with that agency secretary for your number and got it. I remember you didn't really talk much at first. It was almost like you didn't know I existed, but I didn't give up. I kept calling your house."

Phil Craddock held his daughter at arm's length. "Look at it from my point of view, sweetie. After eight years I'd finally gotten around to accepting the loss, and then there you were, a teenager, a stranger."

She broke down the distance between them. "None of that matters

now, Daddy. When you told me a couple of months ago that you wanted us back together, that you were coming to take mother and me home, well, I just . . . ”

Rebecca Wilde interrupted. “Why didn’t you say anything to me, Trish?”

“Mother, you never listen to anything I have to say. If something gets in the way of your precious writing career . . . ”

“Now wait just a minute, young lady.”

Shayne sensed the start of an ugly scene.

“You two settle down,” said Phil Craddock. “Trish, why don’t we give your mother time to calm herself. I’d love a guided tour of the place you call home.”

Shayne could feel the saw-teeth bite again.

“Sure,” said Trish, “but tell me something — who are those three guys, background singers?”

Craddock smiled. “I’ll explain that to you while we walk.”

As the two of them started toward the tennis courts, Shayne turned to Rebecca Wilde. “All right, lady, you got me involved in this mess. So before it goes any further, level with me. What’s going on?”

She looked up at him. “You’re right of course. Come on, let’s go for a walk.”

THEY STROLLED A LONG WHILE IN SILENCE. BEHIND SOME hibiscus they found several concrete benches circling around a rusted sundial that showed it noon. Shayne felt like she was a total stranger.

“Things don’t work out the way you plan, do they?” she volunteered after a while.

“Not on weekends,” he said.

“Not ever.” She pointed over at the sundial. “Do you ever think our lives are controlled by some force greater than we are?”

“Maybe more now than when I started as a detective.” He flipped out an unfiltered Camel, then shoved it back in forcefully. “Why the change of heart about Craddock?”

“You can’t do anything about it. Nobody can.”

“I sure as hell can’t if I don’t know what’s going on. One minute you’re spitting fire at him — the next you’re cooing like a young lovebird.”

She stood up and fingered the rusty dial. “I’ll put this in a language you speak. Blackmail.”

“Blackmail! What’s he got on you?”

“I told you Phil was hard to live with, but when he found out about Trish he went from a flyweight to a heavyweight slugger.”

"What did he find out about Trish?"

"During the 70's Phil was a very hot property. The show, the studio, the network, talk shows — everybody wanted, and got, a piece of his time. Everybody but me. All I got was a tired mate who dragged in at all hours and blamed me for whatever was going wrong at the minute. To make a long story short, I had needs too. And Phil wasn't filling them."

"So you found someone else."

"A lot of someones. I don't apologize for it. Anyway, my prowling was cut short when I had Trish. In fact, for a few years Phil and I sort of patched things up. But then his career cooled. The beatings started again. One night I got madder than I should have. In a rage I got my revenge by screaming out the truth."

Shayne took a calculated guess. "Trish isn't his daughter."

"Right."

"Who's the father?"

"I think I once narrowed it down to five possibilities."

The redhead rasped his left thumbnail across his chin. "And Trish doesn't know this."

"You're right. And that fact leads us back to why I'm being so chummy with Mr. Wonderful."

It was the first thing all weekend that made sense to the detective. "He's threatened to tell her."

"Trish has had so little that most girls can take for granted. She at least needs the image of a father."

"Even if it's false?"

"Yes."

"But why his sudden change, his interest in a family? Especially when he knows that you hate him and that Trish isn't his daughter?"

"That's why I wanted to be alone with him on the ride up here. He never was that good at keeping secrets. You remember when I told you last night about having seen Phil on the news?"

"Yeah, at the White House dinner."

"Well, he was there for a reason. The Hollywood Connection. Don't forget we have an actor in the White House."

Unfortunately, thought Shayne, that wasn't the only place. "What kind of political appointment are we talking about?"

"Phil's real name is Felipe Mendez. His father was an immigrant who made good. Married a starlet from Warner Brothers. Anyway, Phil's up for an Ambassadorship to El Banana Republic somewhere in Central America."

Shayne started making the connections. "Given the post-Watergate

flak where everybody from D.C. Dogcatcher up gets the hard look, Phil wants to be sure that when the FBI runs a comb through his life, it comes out squeaky clean."

"Trish and I were a loose end. Phil knows he has no chance of getting what he wants unless I tell the government what a nice guy he is."

"But you don't want to lie."

"I wish that was all I was worried about. I'm afraid Phil wants an All-American family to take south of the border." She wiped the noon-day perspiration from her brow. "That wouldn't be good for Trish or me. Once he gets us away from this country to a place where he wouldn't have to answer to anyone, no telling what would happen."

"Not to mention your writing career might falter."

"I won't deny I've thought about that, but I'm more concerned about the first time something didn't go right at the embassy. Guess who his scapegoats would be?"

Shayne understood and appreciated her honesty. It was something that had been missing in her today.

"And most importantly," she continued, "it's taken ten years, but you saw my daughter. Trish has finally buried those horrible thoughts about her father. I don't want to undo in one minute what took a decade to right." She paused to look at her hands. The orange rust had stained them completely. "Mike, what can I do?"

Shayne took out a handkerchief and started to wipe the rust clean.

VIII

THEY FOUND CRADDOCK LEANING AGAINST THE FIELD
hockey crease.

"Trish," he announced, "said she'd need half an hour to shower and change into her celebrating clothes. I promised her the three of us'd take lunch together."

"Good," said Shayne, "that gives the three of us time to negotiate."

"Negotiate what?" said Craddock.

"What you want and what Rebecca wants are two opposite extremes. What we need," said the redhead, "is a middle ground."

"Becca," said Craddock, "is this your idea?"

"No," answered the surprised woman. "I told him the situation, that's all."

"And who the hell is he?" Craddock shoved the crease, but it didn't move.

The redhead stepped forward. "Think of me as an interested party."

"Interested in what?" said the white-suited figure.

"A truce. As I understand it, Craddock, you want the Presidential

appointment."

"You know?" The actor stared at Rebecca.

Shayne turned to her. "And she wants to be left alone."

The green-eyed woman nodded.

"Here's what I propose. Rebecca will agree to tell the government agency running the check on you that she sees no reason you shouldn't be made Ambassador. You will agree to take the position in Central America, file for a divorce when you get there, and never bother her or her daughter as long as you live."

Craddock stepped toward his wife. "You told him that last part, too?"

"Everything," she said unhesitatingly.

The actor rubbed the back of his neck with both hands and looked down. "How can I bear to face Trish after what I've just set up?"

"Tell her the truth about your appointment, then about the government situation in Central America, how shakey and dangerous things are. Tell her the real reason you showed up here with Rebecca is that for her and her mother's safety they must stay in the States."

Craddock felt for his slipping toupee. "I don't know if I can . . ."

Shayne said, "What would Dr. David Galen say about his patriotic duty to his country even in the face of terrible personal disappointment?"

"That way," said Rebecca with encouragement, "you could give Trish the one thing that's always been missing in her life, a father to be proud of."

The two of them stood face to face across the crease. They looked at each other, then at Shayne. The redhead could see, could feel them weighing the possibilities. Were things really in balance the way he had said? He decided to prod them. "Right about now one other thought is probably running through your heads — how can I be sure the other party will keep their word?"

Their sudden regards were a confirmation.

Shayne patted his inside sports coat pocket. "In here I've got three rolls of film that our madras-coated, bald-headed photographer has been gracious enough to allow me to hold. Think of me as a kind of U.N. Security Council. As long as you keep your word, you'll never know I exist. But if I hear that either of you has reneged, well, how long does it take to get the phone number of *The National Inquisitor*?"

The detective spotted a tall girl in a white dress coming toward them. So much more to help his bluff. He nodded toward Trish. "Better make up your minds — now."

They both hesitated. As the girl approached, Phil Craddock stepped

forward. "Trish, honey, there's something I need to talk to you and your mother about. Let's go."

As Shayne started back to the Buick, he almost didn't hear a faint "Thank you" in the tropical wind. His mind was already calculating how long it would take him to get to Key West.

AT PRECISELY 8:30 MONDAY MORNING, SHAYNE WALKED into his Flagler Street office.

"Hello, Michael," said his beautiful secretary as she looked up from the word processor. "How was your weekend?"

"Take a letter, Angel," he said, straddling a chair in front of her desk. "In fact, take two."

She pulled out her notepad. "Who to?"

"The first is to Mr. Michael Shayne, Private Investigator. 'Dear Mike, It is my pleasure to inform you that per your request we are instituting a seven-day work week.' Sign it, The President."

The brunette looked at him out of the corner of her eye.

"The second is to Ms. Lucy Hamilton, Private Secretary. 'Lucy, babes, Just a quick note to thank you for getting your delightful — make that *very* delightful — and cooperative boss to come on my show. He's returning the favor. He suggests you'd do well this Friday night. Mark 7:30 P.M. on your calendar.' Sign it, Rex Rhodes."

"What?" she said.

"And add a P.S.," said the redhead. "You go on directly after the monkey who is trying to write the works of Shakespeare on a computer and just before Chuckles the Clown demonstrates his new pie-throwing techniques."

COMING NEXT MONTH

another action-packed Mike Shayne adventure!

DON'T MISS IT!

On the first of May Dave Perry knew his professor was going to kill him. The realization came to him as he sat nursing a beer in the outdoor student pub. What was worse. Stratton would get away with it.

Death Lab

by MIKE HARRIS

DAVE'S HAND SHOOK AS HE SET DOWN HIS BEER AND glared past the cedars at the chemistry department. It was the oldest building on the University of Vancouver campus, an outmoded rabbit-warren of dusty, high-ceilinged labs. And yet most of them had an atmosphere of genial good fun, where beer, cheap food and parties were as important as the rather diffuse goals of research. In January

he'd considered himself lucky to get that opening in graduate school. Lucky to be off unemployment insurance and back doing what he loved most. What a jerk! He hadn't realized that he'd be working for Professor Robert J. Stratton.

They had hit it off badly from the start.

"I normally don't take students with just a B+ average," Stratton had told him rudely at their first meeting. "Your chief asset, Perry, is that you're immediately available. One of my students has just died. Rather tragically, too. So," he went on, with a dismissive glance at Dave's resume, "before we finalize things, perhaps you'll tell me why your company let you go?"

"The research department was disbanded. Economics, sir."

"I see."

Stratton was far removed from the absent-minded professor Dave had naively imagined would be his research supervisor. In fact, he looked too much like the mining company's president with his tailored suit and beautifully brushed silver hair.

As they entered the main research laboratory, it was obvious that Stratton's domain differed considerably from the rest of the department. There professors and students made do with grubby equipment and chemicals of questionable age. But Stratton had appropriated the entire top floor of the building and had gutted it. Rows of spotless white benches and the latest equipment had been installed. Twenty-six graduate students and postdoctoral fellows had been hired. And even though they slaved for a pittance, they could console themselves that their surroundings had cost millions.

"It's unusual for an inorganic chemistry operation to land a multi-million dollar government grant. Especially during these times of economic restraint," Stratton said as he led Dave past the banks of vacuum lines and shelves of chemicals. In spite of its size, the main lab was severely overcrowded.

"However, since the success of *cis-platinate* as an anti-cancer drug," he went on, "there's been great interest in using precious metals to fight the disease. Most of the boys are, in fact, working on platinum. But I'm very interested in rhodium as an alternative. Steve Dawson's findings in this area have been highly innovative. Most of what you see is due to his work."

Dawson should have been working for the mining company, Dave decided.

"You'll work here," Stratton pointed to a corner between a bulky gas chromatograph and the window. A thin, balding student wearing an Iron Maiden t-shirt, was already there, heating a filthy beaker on a

hot plate. "You'll have to share with Mr. Ferguson for the time being as we're squeezed for space."

Ferguson didn't look too happy about this.

Stratton ignored him. "I'm going to give you a chance to prove yourself, Perry. There's a small rhodium project that's a back-up to Steve Dawson's work. Might as well get started straight away. And Perry . . ."

"Yes, sir?"

"I expect my students to get results. Remember that."

Somewhat deflated, Dave moved over to introduce himself. Ferguson shrugged and turned off the hot plate as the beaker bubbled over. "You want some coffee?"

"Er, no thanks. So tell me who is this genius Steve Dawson?"

"He's Bobbie's little sweetie. A total obnox," Ferguson bent over to watch his distillation, sipping from the foul beaker.

"Is he really that brilliant? To generate all this, I mean." Dave waved his hand at the rest of the lab.

"Oh sure. Thanks to Steve-baby we've all got a job. As to being a genius . . . well, you figure it out. He was too bright to go through the normal degree process. The administration didn't know what to do, so they just gave him his PhD. Then Stratton gives him a lab and a post-doc and in three years he cranks out 34 papers. You watch, he'll be a full professor by the end of the summer. At the age of 23 no less."

Pretty tough competition, Dave thought to himself.

"You want some advice, Dave?"

"I guess so. What?"

"Don't expect any help from Dawson. You'll have to get your own results."

RESULTS. DAVE ANGRILY TOOK A LARGE GULP OF BEER. Just how many results could he crank out of a project in five months? A doctorate normally took five years. He stared miserably at the half-inebriated chemists around him, envying them their easy-going supervisors. Getting sick hadn't helped matters either.

"You look a bit gloomy," said a fair-haired young Englishman called Trevor Lake seated across from Dave. "Not getting any lately?"

"Oh, it's nothing like that," Dave snapped. "It's Stratton. That guy really hates my guts."

Trevor made a sympathetic noise and ordered another beer. He was a math post-doc who had been seconded to the chemists' rugby team as the Math Department had no team of its own. This was hardly surprising as most of the mathematicians looked as though they were suffering

from terminal consumption. Trevor, on the other hand, was athletic and a tough customer on the playing field. And he was a popular addition to the chemists because of his love of massive tits and draft beer.

A ribald comraderie had struck up between Dave and himself on the rugby team. Then in March during one disastrous game, a vicious Australian in food science had kicked Dave in the kidneys and given Trevor a concussion, landing them both in hospital. That had cemented the friendship.

Stratton had been furious to learn about Dave's accident and had demanded the medical diagnosis in writing. He found it inconceivable that a six foot football player could be felled by a sissy in Food Science.

"Stratton's not still on about your being off work, is he?" Trevor asked. "What you need, Dave, is a good run round the field and a nice bit for later."

"Are you kidding? The latest edict is: No Rugby!"

"What, no rugby! The man's bloody feudal!"

Dave stared morosely at the dark mountains and silvery ocean just visible through the trees, remembering his fall from grace.

HE HAD RETURNED TO THE LAB ON APRIL FOOLS DAY, feeling a damn fool, too, as he ferried his sister's canary past the familiar vacuum lines and gas cylinders. He had become dear Nicky's unwilling protector after his sister left on an extended vacation. He didn't know what the hell to do with the creature. That morning his landlady had threatened him with eviction pointing to his lease which forbade shrieking birds. The only place left was the lab. Other grad students had posters of nudes or sportscars. Why not a live mascot?

He made for his spot thinking that it didn't look quite right. Then he saw that the gas chromatograph had disappeared and with it, his bench space. There stood Stratton's large new toy, the high pressure liquid chromatograph. Ferguson, too, had vanished.

Dave quickly buttonholed one of the pale, greasy-haired clones at the neighbouring bench.

"What's going on? Where's my equipment?"

"It, er, was moved this morning. To Dr. Dawson's lab," the clone replied uneasily. "It's the only place that has a vacant fume hood."

"But . . . but . . ." Dave stammered. Dawson had never so much as spoken to him and now Dave was to work in Dawson's jealously guarded domain? "Where's Fergie working?"

The clone looked decidedly uncomfortable. "He won't be, Dave. Dr. Stratton fired him this morning."

"What?! What did Fergie do?"

The clone shrugged and kept on scraping out a charred reaction flask.

Dave dropped Nicky's cage on Fergie's empty desk trying to absorb the news. To be honest he wouldn't miss Ferguson's sour company, but firings were unsettling especially on one's first day back. He slowly pulled out his quantum mechanics assignment and tried to work through it, but he was having a hard time concentrating.

"Mr. Perry, what in hell is that?"

It was Stratton on one of his rare walkabouts through the lab. Three of the clones glanced apprehensively in Dave's direction. With a shrill squawk, Nicky fluttered to the top of the cage.

"It's a canary."

"Animals are not allowed in the laboratory. Why aren't you working?"

"But I am working. On my course work, Dr. Stratton. Since the accident, I'm a bit behind."

Stratton's slightly protuberant, dark blue eyes stared at him with all the empathy of a pair of ball bearings.

"Course work is something you do on your own time outside the laboratory. If you spent more time doing research and less in adolescent free-for-all's, you wouldn't be in your present predicament."

"It's hardly my fault I got kicked!"

"You have been moved to Dr. Dawson's laboratory for the time being. It will be a good chance for you to learn some better technique. So get moving. And get rid of that bird!"

SEETHING, DAVE GATHERED UP HIS THINGS AND STALKED down the corridor to Dawson's lab. It was still early but Dawson and his post-doc, Dr. Osaka, were already hard at it, apparently determined to live up to their reputations as ferocious workaholics. Dave remembered Fergie disparagingly referred to the tiny Japanese as Tangerine Dream. Legend had it that Dawson never went home before midnight and that Tangerine often never went home at all. He would simply curl up to sleep on an empty shelf of the chemical cupboard. Perhaps it was just as well that they ignored him as he came in and shoved Nicky's cage onto the window ledge.

He finally located his equipment in one of the cupboards under the bench and began setting up his reaction in an empty fumehood. Might as well have another crack at making that starting material. Perhaps rhodium liked him better now than it had in the past. Maybe Dawson's aura would make at least one of his reactions work.

"May I ask what you're doing?" Dawson had materialized just behind his shoulder, his patrician features betraying mild outrage.

"Sure. Dr. Stratton told me to move in here."

"He did what!"

"Look, it wasn't my idea. There's no more space next door. You don't mind, do you?"

"Of course I mind," Dawson shouted, immediately furious. "I always work alone. Bob knows that."

He tore out of the lab heading straight for Stratton's office. Through the open door, Dave could hardly miss their heated exchange.

"I can't concentrate with that undergraduate incompetent underfoot. Can't you get rid of him? For Christ's sake, Bob, put him somewhere else."

Stratton's voice was distinctly apologetic. "There really is no other place for him, Steven. And it's only for a very short time. Till we can move some of these others down to Farringdon's lab."

Dawson snorted in disgust. "Hasn't that tumour killed the old fart off yet? What the hell does he keep hanging on for?"

"Steven, Steven, I know this is inconvenient. But Perry will benefit greatly by observing your superior technique. As a full professor, part of your work will be teaching . . ."

Their voices were cut off as Stratton closed his door.

"You should not eefs-drop," Tangerine said loftily as Dave turned back to his reaction. "It is better to work. Not to waste time with gossip."

"I notice you got a pretty good earful, too, Osaka."

"I do not spy on my superiors." Tangerine walked back to his bench with as much dignity as five feet of height would let him.

A few minutes later, Dawson slammed into the lab flushed with anger. From then on, Dave really became the Invisible Man.

DAVE BEGAN TO LOATHE EVERY PARTICLE OF DAWSON'S lab. His reactions still refused to work. The yellow, unreacted sediment twirling under the magnetic stirrer mocked him from where it sat in the fume hood. He'd always thought of himself as a good chemist. Now he wasn't so sure.

Only two days ago he had been watching Tangerine meticulously scrape some white crystals from a piece of filter paper onto a clear watchglass, his nose one inch above the bench.

"Reaction not work for you, eh?" It was only the second time Tangerine had spoken to him.

"It couldn't work for anybody. I've tried everything."

"It not work for Gupta Singh either. He try many times before he do suicide."

"I see. Stratton's failed chemists are required to commit *hara kiri* to be cost-effective, eh?" Dave retorted, reminded yet again that he now occupied the position left vacant by Gupta's untimely demise.

"Gupta Singh good chemist," said Tangerine sagely. "But rhodium chemistry very difficult and take many hours study. You must work harder. Make Dr. Stratton proud of you."

Screw Dr. Stratton, Dave fumed silently. Maybe that cynic Fergie was right that most published reactions ought to appear in the *Journal of Irreproducible Results*. And yet right here in the lab was one of the authors of the paper describing his reaction. Perhaps it was time to ease tensions and ask for help.

Steve Dawson was emptying a crimson solid from a funnel onto a piece of weighing paper.

"Steve, can I talk to you for a minute?"

Dawson glanced up irritably. "I'm in the middle of weighing this."

"Better take out your boiling chip," Dave couldn't resist saying. He leaned over and flicked the hard white stone from where it lay buried in the crimson solid. "Your weight will be too much otherwise."

"Why don't you mind your own business!"

"I think your compound's a bit wet, too. "Dave pointed to some pink moisture seeping into the porous paper. "Or do you like getting greater than 100% yields?"

"This is very unstable intermediate," Dawson snapped, banging the plexiglass door to the balance shut. "I don't notice you getting any results."

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about. This paper you and Stratton wrote doesn't give enough information about my reaction."

"It's absolutely trivial. A first year student could do it. You'll just have to keep working."

"I have been for the last three months. I'd really appreciate it if you'd go over the prep with me, step by step."

Dawson tried to stare Dave down, but when Dave refused to budge, he said shortly: "All right. Distill some solvent for me and I'll look over what you've done."

"Come off it, Steve, I'm not going to be your damn technician. What's the matter? Scared of competition from an incompetent undergraduate?"

"You're hardly in a position to demand anything," Dawson said, colouring. "Just give me your notes and I'll tell you what I think."

Dave gladly handed over his lab book and settled back to wait for

Dawson's words of wisdom. They weren't forthcoming.

TODAY, THINGS HAD FINALLY COME TO A HEAD. DAVE had had enough. He planted himself in front of the fume cupboard just as Dawson raced towards it with a foaming beaker.

"O.K., Steve. When are we going to talk about my reaction?"

"Watch it! You're going to cause an accident!" Dawson shoved the mixture, now black and bubbling violently, to the back of the fume hood.

"What about my reaction!"

Dawson shoved Dave aside and hauled out his lab book from a nearby drawer. "Here. The work-up is obvious if you bother to read my paper. Treat the reaction mixture with water."

"Water! Are you sure?"

Well, Dawson was the authority and ought to know. Obediently, Dave poured a trickle of water down the condenser, a hollow water-cooled glass tube connected to the top of the reaction flask. Nothing happened. He added some more. Still nothing. Frustrated, he added a good slug then bent down to see if his reaction mixture was doing anything, however slight.

There was an ominous yellow flash inside the condenser.

Dave nervously took a closer look. His reaction used sodium, a metal that reacts explosively with water. Could a small piece somehow have lodged in the condenser? My God, some had. A large wedge of the stuff was blocking the tube halfway down, bubbling ferociously under the water he had added.

As he looked, the condenser burst violently in two. Glass rocketed past his face far into the lab. Blood trickled down his cheek. In slow motion the burning sodium dropped into the flask. The solvent ignited instantly.

"Jesus Christ! Get out of the lab, you two. Get out! Pull the fire alarm!" Dave cried.

With an ear-shattering crump, the flask ruptured in a brilliant fireball. Yellow flames roared through the fume hood. Jars of chemicals at the back began to explode. Acrid white fumes streamed out over the benches.

"Tangerine! Get out of the way!"

Tangerine wailed in terror and huddled ashen-faced against the wall. Dave lunged for the fire extinguisher. Tangerine came at him, arms flailing, babbling in piercing, girlish terror. Dave grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and heaved him out the door. Dawson staggered out after him, coughing convulsively. No help there either.

Dave yanked the fire extinguisher free and aimed for the base of the flames. Black smoke poured from the charred fume hood, but the fumes were horrendous, too much for his scorched throat and burning eyes. He grabbed a paper towel as he stumbled into the hall, trying to staunch the blood that streamed from his forehead. People in white coats clamoured at him demanding to know what was wrong. In the distance, he heard the eerie cry of a fire engine.

Stratton was striding purposefully towards them. "All right. Everyone out. You heard the fire alarm."

But Dawson's shrill voice echoed above the confusion. "I warned you this would happen. Bob. He'll kill us all. I've never seen anyone so incompetent. Get rid of him! Get rid of him or I quit! I'll quit! I'll quit!"

TREVOR STROKED HIS LUXURIANT MOUSTACHE THOUGHTFULLY. "I was wondering where you got that cut over your eye. I can imagine how sympathetic dear old Stratton was. Did he give you a big kiss?"

"You should have heard him. I thought he'd fire me. But no. Instead he made me move down to the sub-basement."

"Well, at least you won't have to look at his ugly face."

Dave hesitated a moment. "Trev, I . . . I think Stratton's trying to kill me!"

"Come off it. It wouldn't be cost-effective. Besides he doesn't want another coroner's inquest. He got a lot of heat over that Gupta Singh character."

"And where do you think *he* was working? In the sub-basement!"

"Afraid of ghosts, are you?"

"You bet I am. Stratton's going to let the sub-basement murder me."

Trevor banged down his empty. "I think you need another beer."

"And I don't think Gupta Singh killed himself. He was making some weird arsenic compounds. I think he died of arsine poisoning."

"That sounds a bit vulgar, David."

"Just plain nasty. If you mix arsenic and acid, you get a deadly gas called arsine. It happens in ore-refining all the time. Poor Gupta probably generated arsine by mistake. By making him work in that hell-hole Stratton as good as murdered him!"

"Then why didn't that come out at the inquest?"

"Because Stratton hushed up it up, of course. Come on. He's a Big Man and brings a lot of dollars into the university."

Trevor pushed a fresh beer in Dave's direction. "Wouldn't it be

much easier for old Bobbie just to fire you?"'

"He wants his revenge. He's always had it in for me right from the start." Dave pushed back some hair from his forehead. It was damp with sweat. "You haven't seen this place yet. There's no ventilation, the fume hood doesn't work and there's no phone in case I get into trouble."

"That doesn't sound too good."

"You haven't heard the rest yet." Dave's hands closed round the stubby beer bottle as the chill from the beer spread through him. "Stratton's taken me off the rhodium project. My technique isn't good enough." He couldn't keep the bitterness out of his voice.

"That's what's convinced me that he wants me to die. He's revived a dormant project on nickel carbonyl. Do you know what that gas does to you? It gives you lung cancer. But not only that. To make it, I have to use carbon monoxide. It's a deadly poisonous gas that you can't see or smell. You suffocate and if you survive you risk permanent brain damage."

"Then you needn't worry at all, old buddy."

"Stop joking for two seconds, can't you! This is serious!"

"All right then. What do you want me to do?"

"I'm going to fight this. I'm borrowing some air measuring equipment from my old company over the weekend. I'm going to prove that Stratton's trying to kill me. Will you help me get the numbers?"

Trevor sighed, thinking regretfully of the luscious nurse who was waiting for his phone call. "Be glad to. What are friends for?"

SATURDAY MORNING, DAVE LUGGED HIS AIR MEASURING equipment into the chemistry building. Trevor followed, carrying Dave's canary as he had had enough of birdsitting.

The firedoor to the basement was locked. It took half an hour to find the janitor and get the master key. As a student, Dave was not allowed to have one.

"You see what I mean," Dave complained. "Catch 22."

"Don't worry. I've made a note of it."

The basement itself was labyrinth of dank, mouldering brick. Against the south wall, narrow cement stairs led down to the smaller sub-basement. It had only two rooms. One was empty except for some dead gas cylinders. The other was fitted with a heavy oak door that had to be unlocked with the master key.

A squalid sight of bilious cement walls and stained flooring lay beyond. A strip of fluorescent lighting over the wooden bench threw shadows over heaps of abandoned equipment: lengths of pipe and glass

tubing, broken thermometers, pieces of dried rubber hose, and filthy glassware. Jars of chemicals with peeling labels crowded the fume hood.

"Now do you believe me?" Dave demanded.

"All right, you've made your point. They must have been storing all their garbage down here since 1920." Trevor tossed his leather jacket down on the stained bench and ploughed through the detritus towards the fumehood. "Let's get on with it. What's this supposed to be saying?" He held up a long probe used for measuring air currents.

"Exactly what it's saying: zero point zero. No ventilation, no air movement, right?"

"Right. I'm going to take a look in here."

Trevor heaved himself into the fume cupboard and sent some jars rolling. Dave discreetly moved a large flask of nitric acid out of harm's way and handed him the probe. A sticky grey dust rained down as Trevor clanked the probe into the air duct leading out of the fume hood.

"Take it easy, Trev. The hood hasn't been cleaned since Gupta was down here."

"Arsenic? Lovely!" Trevor pushed up the rolling glass door with one hand and leaned out. "Hand me the flashlight, will you?"

"Here. Say, did you hear something?"

Above their heads, there was a faint ringing of chain and a suspicious groaning of a human under duress.

"Maybe Stratton's into S and M with his little sweetheart Dawson," Trevor sneered.

As they listened, the sounds grew louder. On the stairs, there was a terrific banging of metal on metal out of control. Dave tore open the door. Tangerine staggered through, dwarfed by an enormous gas cylinder strapped to a trolley. Sweating and red-faced, the tiny post-doc wheeled the cylinder up to the bench.

"Dr. Stratton say to bring carbon monoxide gas for your experiment," Tangerine panted. Straightening up, he asked suspiciously: "What you do here? Students do not have keys. Only post-docs have keys."

Trevor quickly disappeared inside the fumehood as Tangerine began to unload chemicals from the pockets of his lab coat.

"Here is starting material for you."

"Very obliging of you, Tangerine. Now beat it!" Dave said.

Unperturbed, Tangerine perched himself on a high stool beside the bench and wiggled a finger through the bars of Nicky's cage, hissing and whistling. "Hi, birdie. Hi, birdie."

"He's all yours, Tangie. Take him."

"Animals not allowed in lab."

Trevor's muffled voice rang out: "Zero point zero. By virtue of the exhaust duct being blocked off."

"Fumehood in good working order," Tangerine declared indignantly. "Dr. Stratton say fan put in six months ago. What you do here?" he asked, trying to see what Dave was writing.

Dave flipped over the sheet of paper, hiding his numbers. "Tell me something, Tangie? Why did Stratton make Gupta Singh move down here?"

"Gupta Singh smell!"

"Then why not ask him to take a bath?" asked Trevor, emerging, face smudged, from the fumehood.

"Is not question of personal hygiene," Tangerine said. "Gupta Singh work with arsenic and make smell of garlic whole damn time. Dawson say whole lab stink like panzerotto take-out so Dr. Stratton make Gupta move down here."

"So he could die of arsine poisoning."

"Watch it, Dave," Trevor said, with a sharp glance in Osaka's direction. He began packing up the air probe out of sight of the post-doc's greedy eyes.

"Gupta not make arsine," Tangerine cried angrily. "Arsoles!"

"What!"

"No, no, is not insult!" Tangerine shrieked, cringing. "Gupta synthesize arsoles. Arsoles are most complex arsenic compounds. Gupta do suicide because experiments are not working."

Trevor leaned over Tangerine. "OK, Tangie. You tell us how Gupta did it."

"Come on, Tangerine, tell the nice birdie," Dave said. He lifted the wriggling post-doc by his lab coat and propped him up on the bench beside Nicky's cage. Tangerine's tiny hands flailed at him as he tried to escape.

"No! No! If I say, Dr. Stratton will fire me. I wish for career."

"If you tell us, Nicky will give you a big kiss."

Tangie broke free and tried to smooth his lab coat, greatly put out. "In my country student would not dare to talk to post-doc as you do. You should learn respect. I shall tell Dr. Stratton how you behave to me!"

"Aw, poor baby." Dave stepped back, letting him scramble down off the bench. "Get out of here before we feed you to Nicky."

Tangerine bolted up the cement stairs. Dave waited outside the door a few moments until he was sure the post-doc had gone. With no key,

he'd have to leave the door propped open day and night and he'd be powerless to stop any of Osaka's future spying missions.

A FEW HOURS LATER, THOUGH, HE AND TREVOR HAD collected enough hard data to prove that the sub-basement was a lethal, airless pit, unsafe for even storing chemicals. Dave wanted to take his numbers to the student newspaper and expose Stratton's criminal negligence, but Trevor talked him out of it. By defying Stratton openly, he'd only do more harm to himself. It would be better, Trevor maintained, for Dave to send his figures to the university's safety committee and have them pressure Stratton into giving Dave a better place to work.

Unconvinced, Dave moved his equipment down to the subbasement and tried to study for his exams with only Nicky for company. He had little faith in the university bureaucracy. Trevor was crazy. It was Trev's misguided British sense of ethics. He couldn't just sit there day in and day out. One day, Bob-baby would pay him a little visit, demand to see his results and he'd be out on his ass.

In total frustration, he began to clean up the sub-basement, looking for something, anything that could really nail Stratton. Almost immediately, relics of Gupta Singh's short life surfaced from the debris to haunt him. Gupta's squash racquet had been stuffed under the pile of pipes and his lab books turned up in the cupboard under the sink. The brittle, acid-yellowed pages made depressing reading. Under many of the syntheses, he had simply written "reaction failed."

No damn use, Dave thought as he slammed the cupboard door shut, his attention drawn to some wooden crates against the wall. Now this was much better. Each box was marked with an officious label reading "To be disposed of according to the regulations of the Ministry of the Environment." Each was crammed full of noxious goodies. Typical of Stratton to spend millions on equipment but to be too cheap to pay for disposal of old chemicals. So much easier just to dump them down here and forget them. Out of sight, out of mind. Just like himself, in fact.

It didn't take long to unearth Gupta's famous arsoles. He gingerly sorted through the tiny glass sample vials, wondering how poisonous they were. And this? He pulled out a rusty-lidded jar full of white powder. Some joker had sent Gupta's coffee creamer for proper disposal as well. Maybe they felt uneasy about appropriating the dead man's possessions. He twisted the jar and looked at Gupta's name, written in a spiky, old-fashioned hand on the disintegrating label. Poor bastard.

He started to put it back when he got an idea. This could be exactly what he was looking for. What if the wretched working conditions of

the sub-basement had contaminated Gupta's creamer with arsenic? Suppose Gupta had been slowly poisoned over a period of months while innocently making coffee in the lab. No wonder Stratton would want to hush things up.

He dug out his old analytical chemistry text and got down to work. Everything went like a dream. He couldn't control the trembling in his fingers as he held up the test tube for the final step. The reaction was so strong there could be no mistake. Positive for arsenic!

Now. Stratton, old buddy, prepare for death, he thought to himself as he began the quantitative analysis. He proceeded carefully, to avoid losing even a grain of material. He drew out his pocket calculator and stared at the answer.

He pressed the clear button irritably.

"What you do there?"

Dave jumped, knocking over a beaker of reagent. "Geez, Tangie, don't sneak up on me like that! Look what you made me do!"

He grabbed a handful of paper towels and began mopping up the mess. Tangerine waved a packet of birdseed in his face.

"I am come to feed your bird! You not take care of him. It is very bad for him, no vitamin, no light, no air. He will die because you are negligent."

Dave bit back an urge to throttle Tangie as he went into his hissing routine with the canary. When he next looked up, Osaka was going through his lab book. With large fist, Dave crashed down the cover, missing the post-doc's sharp nose by a hair.

"That's it, Tangie. Out!"

Tangerine stood his ground. "You will regret what you do. I shall tell Dr. Stratton. I shall also say you work on arsenic not nickel. You will be sorry. Very, very sorry."

"OUT!"

Osaka shot out the door as Dave lunged in his direction. Dave angrily tore off his lab coat and rammed the creamer into his empty lunch bag. That snivelling little spy, Tangerine. He'd had enough. He knew the truth now and nothing was going to stop him.

HE WALKED QUICKLY THROUGH THE DEEPENING TWILIGHT towards the Math Department. The light was still on in Trevor's office, thank God.

Trevor himself was at his desk sipping some watery hot chocolate from the vending machine. He looked inordinately pleased with himself, but then teaching the nurses' evening classes always cheered him up.

He raised the styrofoam cup in salute as Dave burst through the door. "Ready for a beer? I'm celebrating the end of three months celibacy. You know, that gorgeous red-haired nurse with the . . ." He sketched two implausible parabolae through the air.

"Will you get off your sex life for a minute? This is more important."

"What could be more important than the consummation of my lusts?"

"This." Dave plunked his lunch bag on Trevor's battered desk and pulled up a chair. "I know how Gupta Singh died. It was because he drank coffee in the lab. Or even hot chocolate!"

"It's disgusting, but hardly lethal."

"But you stir coffee whitener into it to make it taste better, don't you? Gupta kept his coffee whitener in the lab."

Trevor glanced uneasily into his open desk drawer where a jar of coffee whitener rested beside a calculator and jumble of pens. "I'm not sure I follow you."

"You know how the Chemistry Department has been dumping all its garbage in the sub-basement? Well, I found a crate full of Gupta's old arsenic compounds that should have been sent for disposal months ago. And in it, I found this." Dave tore away the brown paper from the mouldering creamer jar. "There's Gupta's name."

"I still don't see — "

"So I analyzed it."

"And?"

"It's 80% arsenic!"

Trevor had the good grace to look shocked.

"You know what this means, don't you, Trev? Gupta was murdered!"

MOMENTARILY AT A LOSS FOR WORDS, TREVOR SWIVELED his chair and dumped the rest of his hot chocolate into a dying plant by the window. Finally he said: "Couldn't the creamer be contaminated just by sitting next to the old arses or whatever?"

Dave laughed in spite of himself. "No way. Maybe a few percent, but never 80%."

Trevor scrunched up the styrofoam cup and tossed it into an overflowing waste basket. "Look here, Gupta probably filled the jar himself. Maybe he broke a container of arsenic and dumped the stuff into that."

"In that case, this would be 100% arsenic. What you call arsenic, is really arsenic trioxide. It's a nice white fluffy powder and mixes per-

factly with coffee creamer, wouldn't you say?" Dave held up the jar. "This was such a simple-minded crime, it was a masterpiece."

Trevor looked skeptical, but he couldn't take his eyes off the innocent-looking whitener. "But who on earth would want to murder poor Gupta?"

"Maybe he didn't need a motive. Maybe he just hated Gupta because he was a foreigner. Look at me. He hates me because I graduated with a 78% average instead of a 90% average." Dave sat back, pleased to have caught Trevor off guard for once. "Well, I'm going to the cop shop. Want to come?"

Trevor remained subdued. "I don't think that would be a good idea."

"What the hell! Whose side are you on anyway?"

"There's no point in getting upset. I just don't think we'd get anywhere. We have no real proof that a crime was ever committed let alone any idea who might have done it."

"Stratton did it, who else?"

"You have no evidence to back that up. Did you ever think that once the police get wind of your feud with Stratton they might accuse you of adding the arsenic yourself just to get back at him?"

Dave angrily shoved back his chair. "Well, if I can't go to the police, what can I do?"

"Maybe you should quit grad school."

"And do what? Go back on pogey? No way!"

"Well, then, stay the hell out of the sub-basement. Do a literature search, stay in the reference library, anything."

"I can't sit on my ass in library for the next year!"

"It's too dangerous for you to do any reactions in the sub-basement anyway. So in effect you are sitting all day getting a wider backside already, aren't you? Besides . . ." his voice trailed off.

"WELL?"

Trevor looked up almost apologetically. "What if there really is a murderer? You know you can't lock that damn door to the lab."

"OK. Then I know what to do." Dave stood up and pushed the jar over to Trevor. "Lock this in your filing cabinet, will you. Tomorrow I'm going straight to the student newspaper."

Trevor looked troubled. "I don't think that's the right way either. Then Stratton won't just fire you. He might sue you for slander."

"Geez, Trev, I come to you for help and all I get is told is that I might as well shoot myself!"

"Ease up, will you. I just don't know what to do. Let's go have that

beer and then decide."

Trevor locked the poisoned creamer in the bottom drawer of his filing cabinet and followed Dave outside. They trailed down the ill-lit path to the pub in uneasy silence. The crenellated silhouette of the Chemistry Department was dark against the drifting night clouds as they passed it.

Suddenly Dave stopped.

"I just remembered. I have to fetch Nicky or my sister will kill me. She came back yesterday. You go on ahead and order me a draft."

"Why don't I come with you?" Trevor suggested, feeling slightly apprehensive.

"So where's the cool, logical mathematician we used to know and love? I'm a big boy now, in case you didn't notice. I'll be there in five with my little pal Nicky."

"All right then." Trevor hesitated a moment longer, jingling his change, then went on alone.

Dave watched Trevor disappear into the dark then went in the side entrance. A late night seminar was just breaking up as he reached the basement stairs. He spotted Stratton in jocular conversation with the speaker and sidled round the corner to avoid him. He went down into the gloom, thinking about poor Nicky, victim of neglect.

The lights in the sub-basement had gone out. Dave swore under his breath remembering that the circuit breakers lay at the bottom of the stairs. He went down slowly, bracing himself against the rough, peeling paint of the wall. As he reached the bottom of the stairs, he tripped. He swore again and reached through the blackness.

A faint rustling sound near the gas cylinder room sent a shiver of fear through him. Instinctively he lashed out, an instant too late. Something unbelievably hard and violent struck his temple. Neurons exploded in a flare of crimson then faded out like a dying video.

As Trevor swung through the door of the pub, he was hailed by a sodden voice.

"Hey, Trev. Over here. Is Dave with you?" It was Ferguson, sprawled over a threadbare red armchair, a rye and coke in his hand.

"He's just behind me. So what've you been doing? It's been a long time."

"Well, I can show my face now that I have a job. I'm writing backfill for the local rag. You know, 'bus plunge kills 27', that sort of crap."

"Journalism? Well, Fergie, you're full of surprises."

"Not really. It was exploit the family connections or starve." He downed the remains of his drink and ordered another. "Sit down. I was

hoping I'd run into Dave and figured the pub was a good bet. I could use those numbers you guys got in the sub-basement. I'm doing a little exposé on student working conditions."

"And get Dave kicked out of the university for good? Forget it."

"Don't you think things are headed that way already?"

Trevor waved away Fergie's offer of a beer, trying to dismiss the image of the hideous jar from his mind.

"Fergie, do think Stratton would deliberately harm Dave?"

Ferguson looked up in surprise as he munched a mouthful of barbecue chips. "No. Personally, I think he's trying to make Dave quit."

"Why wouldn't he just fire him, like he did you?"

"The administration might question it. Dave's a good chemist. Everyone knows you don't get many results the first two years of your PhD. Dave's only been there five months. Besides he was sick for six weeks. Naw, Bob-baby canned me for something else entirely."

"For what?"

Ferguson shifted his eyes to the door, suddenly cagey. "What's keeping Dave?"

AT FIRST HE KNEW ONLY THAT IT WAS MUSTY AND DARK. He lay still, trying to sleep, but pain clawed through his skull forcing him awake. He lashed out and struck something hard. Nausea vaulted up from his stomach. He struggled helplessly against it then rolled over and was horribly and violently sick.

He felt wretched, but the act had shaken him back to reality. Where was he? His hand fumbled down a wooden cupboard door. He must be in the lab, sprawled out beside the bench.

He propped himself up against the cupboard helplessly dizzy. This was no good. He had to get help, see a doctor. He rolled over onto his knees and crawled to the end of the bench.

He groped blindly through the cupboard underneath the sink. Where was the flashlight? He and Trevor had left it there after doing the air sampling. It had to be there. It had to be. His fingers closed round the smooth handle. Light flared through the darkness hurting his eyes.

That was better. He grabbed the edge of the bench and hauled himself up. What was he doing in the lab? When did he set up that reaction in the hood? What was it he was going to do? Think, Dave, think. Oh, yes, fetch Nicky.

The flashlight glittered on the bird cage, but no canary. He stumbled over to it. Had the door come loose? As he picked it up, something slid across the bottom.

He peered into the cage through the gritty light. Nicky was as lifeless

as a Monty Python parrot.

He felt sick again and slid down onto the floor. He blinked stupidly trying to think why the lab looked different. Something was wrong but his numb, useless jelly of a brain refused to function. He was staring right at it and he didn't understand, those two straps hanging loose from the bench. He sat up. The carbon monoxide cylinder was gone!

That's what that nagging, hissing sound was. Gas! Carbon monoxide! Miners had once used canaries to warn them of the lethal gas. Carbon monoxide had killed Nicky. That's why that reaction was set up in the hood: *incompetent undergraduate dies while making nickel carbonyl*.

He leapt at the door. Locked of course. Without a key he was trapped. He tore at the door knob. Definitely locked. Break it down, break it down! Pain crashed through his side. The door was like a stone wall. He threw himself at it again. No good. He drew back panting. Something white was showing under the door. Towelling, stuffed into the gap from the other side.

Dave's fist crashed uselessly against the wood. "You bastard! You're not going to get away with this!"

Where was he pumping it in? Dave slid the beam of the flashlight over the walls. The bulb began to dim.

"No, not now, goddammit!"

The light flickered and went out. Panic ripped through him. He stumbled and fell on top of the debris. Glass tubing shattered under his weight. There had to be something in here, something, anything.

His hand closed round a broken piece of pipe. He crawled back to the door fighting the gas as it leeched away his life.

He rammed the jagged end of the pipe into the centre of the door. Splinters flew into his face. He worked it free then drove it in again.

I'm a big guy. It'll take a lot of gas. All I need is one little hole.

He went on bashing the door, struggling against the insidious temptation to rest.

The pipe burst through and sent him sprawling. He pulled himself onto his hands and knees, groping for his precious weapon. Clutching the pipe, he shoved his face against the shattered wood. Air, at last.

Something moved behind the door. He stabbed the sharp end of the pipe through the hole and heard a satisfying yelp of pain. Footsteps came back. Something slopped through the hole. Acrid fumes seared his throat.

Nitric acid!

TREVOR FORCED HIMSELF TO STOP WATCHING THE DOOR.

Where the hell was Dave?

"All right, Fergie, give over. What possible difference can it make now?"

Ferguson blew out a stream of cigarette smoke and braced his foot on the scarred coffee table. "OK. Why not? I was doing a little B and E on Bobbie's office and he caught me with my pants down. So to speak."

"Whatever for?"

"Because Gupta Singh was a good friend of mine," Fergie said angrily. "We split a pizza the night he supposedly offed himself. I just couldn't believe he'd go back downstairs and poison himself twenty minutes after he tells me he's going back to India to get married. He was really happy, making plans. I just couldn't credit it. I knew Bobbie had a copy of the coroner's report, so I decided to take a look for myself."

"So it was a lab accident with arsine after all!"

Ferguson shook his head. "That's what I wanted to believe. But the autopsy found an overwhelming amount of arsenic in Gupta's stomach. So I guess he did do it after all. Just mixed it in his hot chocolate and drank it."

Liquor, cigarette ashes and chips crashed to the floor as Trevor leapt to his feet. "We've got to get out of here!"

DAVE CROUCHED NEAR THE WALL, COUGHING VIOLENTLY as acid fumes scorched his throat. He had to keep fighting. He kept on yelling for help, but he was losing his voice. Someone would hear him, they had to. More acid gushed through the hole . . .

TREVOR LEANED ON THE BUZZER AT THE ENTRANCE TO the chemistry building. Where the hell was the janitor?

"Forget it, Trev," Fergie said behind him. "The janitor's an old drunk. If he hasn't answered by now — "

"Wait!" Tangerine's slight, white-coated figure was coming down the hall. "Don't let him see you." Trevor hauled Ferguson round the holly bush beside the entrance.

"But if he doesn't see us, how can he — "

"Shut up!"

Tangerine scowled through the glass. He unlocked the door and held it part way open as he squinted into the night.

Trevor leapt out of the bush and shouldered his way through. Tangerine went white with fury: "So it is you who disturb me. I cannot do experiment with buzzer going, going whole damn night. I have

called police. Soon they will arrest you."

"Shut up, Tangie. Give me the key."

Tangerine refused. Trevor grabbed his arm and began foraging through his pockets. Tangerine squealed in outrage and pummelled Trevor across the back with surprising strength. They collapsed, wrestling onto the floor. The keys fell out of Tangerine's lab coat and skittered across the tiles.

"Trev, the cops!" Ferguson cried.

Two enormous police officers were getting out of a black and white cruiser.

Trevor scooped up the keys and bolted for the basement stairs, hearing Tangerine's hysterical outburst behind him as the cops came through the door.

He raced down the dim basement stairs shouting for Dave. He paused, straining to hear the slightest sound. Nothing. He went over to the sub-basement stairs. Darkness lay like a deep, prenatal pool at his feet.

"O.K., buddy, upstairs." A hard hand grabbed him above the elbow.

The second policeman came up to him. "Dr. Osaka says you assaulted him."

Trevor looked from one milk-fed face to the other. "The hell he did. A man may be down there. He may be hurt."

"Just come along quietly. Like your friend." They began pulling him towards the stairs.

In desperation, Trevor tried to break free. "Listen, damn you. That's gas."

There at the threshold of hearing was a weak hissing. The two cops looked at each other. "OK. Let's take a look."

One of them held Trevor, while the larger one slowly went down the sub-basement stairs.

"Where's the damn light switch?" he yelled up.

"Try the circuit breakers. Over by the right," Trevor shouted back.

A moment later, light flared up from the stairwell. The three of them stared at the huge gas cylinder.

"Holy God!" The large cop fumbled with the door.

Trevor jerked himself free and charged down the stairs with the smaller cop behind him. His hands shook as he forced the key in the lock and flung open the door. Dave was lying by the bench, completely motionless. Trevor felt himself shoved roughly to one side as the smaller cop bent over Dave.

"Is he — is he all right?"

"You'd better get an ambulance."

"We need the antidote for carbon monoxide," Trevor yelled at them.

The door to the gas cylinder room burst open. A white-coated figure hovered there for an instant then vanished up the stairs. The large cop went after it. At the top of the stairs the man turned.

"Look out!"

A wrench flickered through the shadows and smashed into the cop's forehead. Blood spurted over the wall.

Trevor roared up the stairs. The white figure was disappearing into the gloom of the north corridor. He sprinted after it, hearing his own footsteps echo through the empty cellars. The murderer was there, facing him, face wild with rage. The fire door was locked and barred. No way out for either of them.

Rational thought had gone. Trevor hurled himself at the man's vulnerable diaphragm. But his target was thin and agile and dodged him easily. Trev missed and went down but got a good grip on that spotless coat. He caught a brief glance of the wrench before it hit him. Pain exploded through his side but he refused to let go. He clawed up the coat, grappling with that writhing body, fighting back with every nasty punch he knew, groping for that styled hair.

The man's head jerked back as he howled in outrage. With his free hand he went for Trevor's eyes. Trevor twisted away but the longish nails burned across his cheek. He kicked out and connected crunchingly with a kneecap. There was a scream of anguish as the man crashed heavily onto the dusty floor. Trevor slammed a fist into the lean square jaw with everything he had. The murderer gave a sort of cough and lay still.

Trevor couldn't get up. He just sat there, gasping for breath.

The large cop came up to him, wiping blood from his eyes. "You hit him pretty hard. Hope you didn't kill him."

"No such luck."

Together they stared at the pale, chiselled features of Steve Dawson.

MINUTES LATER THE CHEMISTRY BUILDING WAS FULL OF noise, lights and people. Dave struggled weakly as a paramedical fitted an oxygen mask to his face.

"Half an hour in the hyperbaric chamber and your friend will be fine," the medic reassured Trevor. "Are you sure you don't want to come along? You look as though you could use some help."

Trevor shook his head.

"Look." Ferguson pointed over the medic's shoulder. Stratton had

arrived with Tangerine close behind him.

"Wasn't it Steven who was hurt?" Stratton asked in surprise as Dave was wheeled past him to the waiting ambulance.

"No, sir," said a plainclothesman beside him. "He's down at the station under arrest."

"For what!"

"For attempted murder and assaulting a police officer."

"Is that what they told you? Those two?" Stratton gestured violently in Trevor and Ferguson's direction.

"If you'll just step this way, sir." The detective motioned them into the bare, uncomfortable student lounge.

Stratton flung his trenchcoat onto the ripped vinyl sofa and refused to sit down. "I want my lawyer on this immediately. Perry's hopelessly incompetent. He's already caused one serious fire. And this is the thanks Steven gets for trying to save his life!"

"Sure," Ferguson snorted. "Saving him by pumping poison gas into an airtight lab you damn well knew was unsafe."

"That's ridiculous. I would never endanger one of my students."

"Wouldn't you?" Trevor asked from where he had collapsed exhausted on a wooden chair near the vending machine. "Dave complained to the safety committee weeks ago. I helped him get the numbers he needed."

"I don't know anything about that. If anyone's life was at risk here, it was Steven's."

"Bullshit!" Ferguson screamed. "Stop covering up for him, you bastard. He tried to *kill* Dave, murder him to cover up his murder of Gupta Singh!"

"That is a bare-faced, malicious lie!" Stratton cried, crashing his fists down on the plywood table in front of him. "I dare you to produce one shred of evidence for your evil accusation. Fine words from a cunning little rat I caught burglarizing my office. You keep on like this, boy, and I'll have you charged!"

"Wrong again, Stratton. We have the proof." Trevor quickly told the detective about the jar in his files and a constable was sent to fetch it.

"More lies," Stratton raged as he paced back and forth along the table, still refusing the detective's offer of a chair. "This is unbelievable — a foul conspiracy to discredit a brilliant scientist."

"Too bad his talents didn't extend to crime," Trevor remarked acidly. "But I grant you that he was so simple-minded, he was effectively brilliant. Actually, it was your fault, Stratton, that he was caught."

Stratton's hard blue eyes glared at him. "Are you accusing me as well?"

"Merely of neglect. If you hadn't been stingy about proper chemical disposal, the creamer would have disappeared and Dawson would never have been found out. Makes you wonder, doesn't it? What fastidious impulse make him put the creamer out for proper disposal? I think it was because he knew it was full of arsenic."

"I refuse to listen to this. What possible motive would Steven have? Answer me that!"

"Very well." Trevor's bearing was calm as he faced him. "The most logical explanation for all that has happened is that Dawson has been systematically falsifying all his reactions. The 34 papers you used to build your research empire have as much substance as a fairytale. You and he have defrauded the government of millions."

Stratton went white, as his lips moved soundlessly. "That's absurd," he croaked. "Scientists don't cheat."

"Really? Cheating in science is an honourable tradition. Just think of all the students who cook their lab reports to get a better mark."

"Peer review of scientific research ensures that this sort of thing can't happen."

"Oh, I grant you that he would have been found out sooner or later, but it would probably have taken years. He could count on you to stymie any questions about his work. Even if you had your own suspicions, you would never have admitted it even to yourself. He was literally worth millions to you."

Stratton slumped down onto the sofa beside a trembling, wide-eyed Tangerine. "I refuse to comment on this."

Trevor kept on. "Dawson must have had a bad moment when you moved Dave into his lab. He realized pretty quickly that Dave was clever enough to see through his 'superior technique'. He couldn't intimidate him either. He'd have to get rid of him.

"So he rigged Dave's lab accident and got Dave banished to the sub-basement. But Dave was a fighter and Dawson got even more nervous. Imagine his terror when he learned — probably from Osaka here — that Dave was testing the coffee whitener for arsenic, the whitener he believed had long since disappeared into a landfill site. He decided to risk another murder. Dave would be gassed to death while making nickel carbonyl."

"I have nothing to say," Stratton muttered.

"Gupta knew, though, didn't he, Bob-baby?" Fergie said in an ugly voice. "He'd tried the rhodium reactions, showed you his detailed notes and you'd refused to listen. You made him switch to the arsenic

project. All it took was your sweetie complaining about the garlic smells and Gupta was heaved into the subbasement. He'd finally decided to go to the Dean. That's what he told me the night he died."

"An interesting theory," the detective broke in, closing his notebook. "But you're forgetting one person who could clear it all up, eh Dr. Osaka?"

Terrified, Tangerine looked wildly from one face to another. With an anguished wail, he buried his face in his hands. "I am much ashamed. For sure Dawson is cheating."

Stratton wheeled on him. "Osaka! What are you saying!"

"Forgive me, Professor Stratton, but now is time for truth. Police say is murder."

"But — but, Osaka." Stratton looked ghastly. "You should have come to me at once. Confided in me."

"You would not have listened. I am a foreigner. Already one foreigner, an excellent chemist, has spoken to you then he do suicide. I am afraid." Tangerine burst into tears. "I wish for career," he sobbed miserably.

"YOU KNOW THE COURTS WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO PROVE Dawson guilty of Gupta's murder," Trevor told Ferguson later as they left the Chemistry Building. "You watch. Stratton's pricey lawyer will get him off with a suspended sentence. The poor little bugger was under a 'terrible strain,' so terrible he tried to gas Dave."

"At least he's finished as a scientist. And Stratton, too. He'll never get another million dollar grant," Ferguson said, foraging in his pocket for his cigarettes.

"Don't be too sure. These things take time." Trevor sighed as Ferguson lit up. "Can I have one of those?"

"Sure, but I thought you quit." He watched Trevor draw the smoke deeply into his lungs. "Don't worry. Remember, I'm now in a position to put a stop to those two. Dave's still got his side of the story to tell."

"Right. I'm off to the hospital to check in on him. Need a lift?"

"I'll come with you."

Together they headed for the parking lot, deserted except for Trevor's Honda. Over their heads, the stars were fading into the dawn, one by one.

She was a peaceful woman who loved cats. Why would anyone want to murder her?

Revenge in Dublin

by JEAN DARLING

THE CAT WOMAN, AS SINEAD SULLIVAN WAS KNOWN LOCALLY, had come to Sandymount when it was still just a village on the shore of Dublin Bay; before the Capital City had gobbled it up on its way to the south. And the gate house with its gingerbread-house-peaked-roof had been her home for more years than anyone could remember. As time passed "progress" swept away the old mansion; modern housing lumped together in ugly proximity until only this small remnant of more gracious days remained behind a high wrought iron fence. Even Miss Sullivan herself had been withered by the years into an untidy white-haired shadow who crept amongst the countless cats that swarmed through the tiny house, unkempt garden and straggle of disused sheds.

It would seem some kind of feline grapevine alerted strays for miles around that the old woman was a soft touch. So they came for a meal or a nap or to relieve themselves of kittens. Some used her hospitality as

a rest stop to God knows where, some settled down grateful for the fragile security offered by the old age pensioner. And all the while day in and day out, year after year, John McCormack sang "Macushla," his sweet tenor pinched and tinny as he wound out his song on the hand cranked Victrola. Then, one morning there was no music. There was no miaowing. Miss Sullivan was dead and foul play definitely was suspected.

THE BODY HAD BEEN DISCOVERED BY JILLY O'BRIEN, A colt-like fourteen-year-old who had become the old lady's self appointed helper. On the way to school each day she stopped to see what Miss Sullivan needed at the shops. At lunchtime she dropped off the purchases. On weekends the girl mowed the grass and brought in coal from a shed. When she had called in that morning The Cat Woman lay in the doorway and most of the cats, sensing their mentor no longer was functional had set off for greener fields. The few diehards that remained were mostly kittens, one of which was clutched to Jilly's narrow chest as she waited beside Garda Liam O'Connor for Maura Kelly to open the garden door to the house on Tritonville Road.

" . . . with the parents both at work I brought her here," Liam wound up after having told Maura and her blind friend, Declan Fogarty, about Sinead Sullivan.

"I could have gone to school." The girl's voice was barely audible. They were grouped around the kitchen table upon which sat tea things, plates of biscuits, brown bread, butter and jam.

"Well, I have to get back on the job." The big policeman rose. "You'll be alright here with Maura; her husband's a Guard just like me." He stood in the doorway shifting his hat from one hand to the other. Had Jilly been either ice-cream cone size or an adult he would have known the right thing to say. But this half-grown creature holding a kitten in her arms was a different kettle of fish.

"Liam O'Connor, will you get out of here?" Maura said.

When he had gone she emptied the girl's untouched tea into the sink and poured her a fresh cup. Poor thing's in shock, Maura thought. After all she had been through a lot that morning and had behaved very competently: calling the police and an ambulance as well as giving a statement on the spot. Later, when her parents could accompany her to the Irishtown Garda Station she would have to dictate and sign a proper statement for the records.

"Come, love, a sup of tea will do you good," Maura said, touching Jilly's small blonde head, pleased that she still was a little girl unlike the majority of fourteen-year-olds who were poured into obscenely tight

jeans and wore a half a pound of make-up. "What are you going to do with the kitten?" Maura took the tiny Tabby from the girl.

"I hadn't thought. Mammy doesn't like cats — I don't know."

"Mannix doesn't like cats much either," Declan piped up as scratching sounded on the kitchen door. "That's him now. You'll see. One bite and — " The blind man snapped his fingers. But he couldn't have been more wrong, the big Alsatian seemed charmed by the tiny Tabby cat.

WHILE MAURA WAS SUPERVISING THE MEETING OF THE two animals, her husband, Shay Kelly, was eighteen miles away moving across a field shoulder to shoulder with a dozen or so other cops searching for clues to a murder. The body, a young man with several stab wounds, had been discovered shortly after six that morning by the farmer who owned the field. Being a country area with few police to call upon for special duty, the local Sergeant had contacted the nearest Garda Stations hoping they would have a man to spare for his search party. When a request of this type was received at the Irishtown Barracks, Shay Kelly's services always were on offer. It made Sergeant Clancy's day whenever the opportunity arose to ship the tall Guard somewhere far away for as long as possible. Like before Christmas when he had been positively ecstatic to wave Shay off on a tour of duty that lasted for weeks up along the border with Ulster searching for a kidnapped tycoon who eventually was found unharmed.

It wasn't that Sergeant Clancy actually disliked Shay Kelly, it was just that the man from County Clare was always haring off somewhere to try and solve a case despite orders to the contrary. "Thinks he's a Goddamn one man Garda Siochana," Clancy was often heard to say when discussing his least favorite subordinate and he was just waiting for the day when the "smart ass Culchie would come a cropper."

Recently, Clancy began a campaign to get Kelly transferred to the Rathmines Garda Station. Over the years a good part of this once elegant area had dwindled into a "flatlands" filled with students, drop-outs and Punks. In Rathmines Kelly would find more than enough crime to keep even an eager beaver like him happy for eighteen hours a day seven days a week, Clancy thought, completely overlooking the number of crimes in his own bailiwick. Like the murder of The Cat Woman, still unsolved after the passing of more than a month; the teen-age drug pushers caught selling in and around Sandymount Green; the joy riders in a stolen BMW who had trashed six cars parked along the Strand Road. Practically every night houses were broken into, bicycles and motorbikes were being stolen or vandalised and just the

other day the bank had been robbed for the second time on the same afternoon another set of chancers made off with the Supermarket receipts.

Shay Kelly, being well aware that his Sergeant was doing his level best to have him moved, was equally as determined to stay exactly where he was. He liked Sandymount, he lived in Sandymount and hell or high water he was not going to be ousted over to Rathmines. Unlike Sergeant Clancy, Seamus did not consider crime a disease indigenous to only certain sections of the community. But one thing he did find indigenous to the police department was the ease with which crimes having gone unsolved for a long time were put on "the long finger," which meant that, although they were still in the active file, nobody paid much attention to them. It wasn't the department's fault really, it was just that there were more crimes than cops. It was as simple as that.

This was the reason he had been pondering the murder of Sinead Sullivan, The Cat Woman. It had been considered a simple case of robbery by the Coroner's Inquest in which the old woman, being frail and over eighty, had lacked the physical stamina to withstand the torture that had been meted out to her. And for what — a measly few pounds pension money?

Jilly had cashed her weekly voucher at the Post Office on the way home from school the day before she had been found dead. Had Jilly mentioned it to someone? She claimed not. But children were forgetful at the best of times.

The gate house had been ransacked; it probably was that more than anything else that drove the cats away. "If only they had been dogs," Shay said out loud.

"If only what had been dogs," Declan asked. "Would you believe not a word out of him this last half hour and then he says 'if only they had been dogs!'" They were in Clark's Pub sharing a table with Liam O'Connor. Mannix was under the table noisily lapping his second dollop of stout out of a well washed ashtray.

"I think he's talking about Sinead Sullivan. It's getting to be scarey now just walking abroad at night. Did you hear Bord Failte is giving the tourists a list of no-go areas in Dublin?" Liam signaled the bartender for three more pints.

"If you were armed, it might make the chancers think twice before they knocked old age pensioners on the head for a few pounds. A stick's just no good nowadays."

"It's not going to happen — side arms, I mean. At least not yet, Declan. We just have to be careful that's all, but that doesn't do people like Sinead Sullivan any good. Has McLean come up with any ideas as

to who killed her?" Shay's voice held a hint of resentment at being always kept at arm's length as far as current investigations were concerned.

"Oh, that has been put on the long finger — I thought you knew. The Sergeant doesn't have any hopes of finding the kids who did it. There are so many breakins." Liam sighed. "Anyway, they found nothing in the old lady's house or garden that was out of the ordinary — just the accumulated junk of years and enough balls of cat fur to fill a half a dozen mattresses."

IT WAS NO WONDER THAT NOTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY had been found in The Cat Woman's house — Jilly had carried off a box full of most unusual material a few days before the old woman had been killed.

"Miss Sullivan gave me all these pictures of cats — she wanted me to put them in a scrapbook for her, the nicest ones, o'course," the girl said as she struggled the apple-boxful of cuttings from every imaginable kind of publication into the kitchen where Declan Fogarty was finishing a late lunch. "She's been saving them for years, Mrs. Kelly, but now she's dead the Mammy said I should give them to you for the Old Folks' Sale of Work." Then refusing all offers of food and drink, Jilly scurried off to wherever she spent her free afternoons.

Maura put the box in an upstairs room with all the other things, old and new, that had been donated for the sale that was held twice a year. The proceeds were used to offset running costs on the building where the old people met daily for a hot midday meal and an afternoon of gossip. As the building itself was small and Maura had several unused rooms in the house on Tritonville Road she felt this was a good way to make use of the space.

A day or two after Jilly's call a trio of ladies who were interested in helping the Old Folks' Association dropped by to pick up some yarns and donated cloth to be made into various articles for the sale. Maura offered them the boxful of cat pictures. "Ah an' what would we be doin' with them things?" they chorused before troup ing down to the kitchen for tea and biscuits shared with Declan, Mannix and Tidbit, the kitten.

Their refusal to make use of the cat pictures decided Maura on collecting a few cardboard boxes from the supermarket. Pasted solid with the colorful pictures and shellacked, the pieces could be fashioned into attractive items that would bring a nice price. With this end in view Maura brought the box downstairs one rainy afternoon thinking to sort the color from the black and white. Halfway down she began to find

articles neatly clipped from various newspapers mixed in with the cats. These she put to one side. When at last the box was empty of clippings, she found an array of neatly tagged keys.

THAT NIGHT WHEN SHAY ARRIVED HOME HE WAS IN A vile mood. He had come straight from court where he had testified as arresting officer. "God I'm fed up with the piddling non-sentences that are handed down from the bench. That yoke today might be only twenty-two but he's a hardened criminal that I pulled in a half dozen times last year for house-breaking and all he got were cautions. This time when I caught him red-handed mugging a seventy-three year old pensioner the Judge gave him only two years — "

"Two years seems a step in the right — "

"Suspended, Maura, two years suspended, and he gave no excuse like drugs or being out of work — he just grinned." Shay slumped at the table and shook his head. "Sometimes I wonder if I shouldn't have become a Vet." Whenever Kelly mentioned his childhood ambition to be an animal doctor both Maura and Declan knew the big man needed to talk out his frustrations uninterrupted. So they just sat back and listened to his diatribe against the system.

NEXT MORNING BEING SHAY'S DAY OFF, MAURA SHOWED him the pile of keys found at the bottom of The Cat Woman's box. "I thought these might interest you," she said, going on to explain how she had come upon them.

"So the old lady had a thing for keys," Shay said, moving them on the table with a finger.

"Shay Kelly, you are a pain. Look at the tags on them." Maura set a plate of bacon and scrambled eggs in front of him. "Are you finished with your cereal, Declan?"

He nodded. "Give me a feel of those keys and stop trying to sound mysterious, Maura lass."

"Well, the tags are rather mysterious. They all have some numbers and letters written on them. At first I thought they might be license numbers or telephone numbers . . ." Her voice dwindled as she poured the tea.

"How else would the old lady know one from the other if they weren't labeled. Look, love, I know you're trying to get my mind off that damn — "

"No, she's on to something I think. All of these keys are duplicates and cut by an amateur I'd guess — the edges are so rough." Declan ran a thoughtful finger over the cut edge of first one key then another.

"Please, love, just look at the tags. This one for instance has E E A dash 8249 written on it or this one here: D L H dash 79187 9 or — " Shay, who during a sleepless night had decided not to get involved in any unauthorized investigations ever again, interrupted to tell them they were welcome to play their little games but for himself he thought Mannix could do with a run on Sandymount Strand.

AN HOUR OR SO LATER LIAM O'CONNOR FOUND HIM LYING back on the grass watching the clouds scud by. But he wasn't finding shapes like he and Maura did on fine afternoons, he was remembering how Jilly O'Brien had crossed the street rather than speak to him on two occasions during the past week.

"I found something on the footpath outside your house, thought I'd bring it along with me," Liam called as he assisted the "something" named Declan Fogarty over the uneven grassy ground until Mannix bounded up to assume responsibility for his master. O'Connor ruffled the dog's ears, waved to Shay and moved off along the Strand section of his beat.

"I think we did it," Declan said as he lowered himself down beside Shay using the Alsatian for support. "Figured out what the tags on the keys mean — at least part of it. Here — Maura wrote it down for you." Sitting up, Shay took the piece of blue note paper from the blind man. "Now, you will see the words: D E L F T C H I N A. That's a code used by jewellers or antique dealers and the like on price tags, you know. Using a code they know exactly what an item is worth so they can charge what they think the traffic will bear. D is one, E is two, and so forth until we reach N which is 9. The A stands for zero, of course. So the E E A on one of the tags stands for 220."

"That's fine as far as it goes but the tag reads E E A - 8249 Maura's written here. What does the 8249 stand for? Using the same code it spells: I E F N."

"I know it doesn't make sense, but Maura read all the tags into my cassette recorder so I can keep working on it and I bet you a tenner that those keys are house keys and most probably to the front doors."

LEAVING FOGARTY IN THE ALSATIAN'S CARE, SHAY HEADED for the school Jilly O'Brien attended on the Strand Road only to find her class was away on some kind of a field trip. He left a message at the office asking the girl to stop by his house on the way home from school and headed for the gate house where Miss O'Sullivan had lived and died.

The two halves of the gate were wound together with a chain and

padlocked by the police he supposed — kind of like locking the barn door after the horse had been stolen. He walked around the block to the laneway at the rear hoping to find entrance through one of the dis-used sheds behind the little house but, these too, were buttoned up tight. Boards were nailed across the doors and except for deep water-filled wheel ruts the narrow lane was overgrown with weeds. Shay walked on to discover the lane widened eventually into a space large enough to turn a vehicle around, before it dwindled out of sight behind a high stone wall.

Finding nothing of interest, he retraced his steps to where a large rambling building loomed with brick-blinded windows and doors. Here he found evidence of heavy traffic. He squatted down to look at tire marks, footprints and strange shallow furrows all jumbled one on top of the other on the bald patch of ground in front of one of the bricked up doors.

"Liam, if I hadn't seen those doors were bricked solid, I'd swear something had been taken in or out of the building that way."

"Probably a kid's prank. You know like tossing a brick through a car window for the crack." The two cops, O'Connor in uniform and Kelly wearing jeans and a T-shirt, were leaning on the railings surrounding Sandymount Green watching a small girl try to poke out her patient collie's eye. Suddenly across the park a woman's scream sent them vaulting over the fence in pursuit of the would-be purse snatcher who, on reaching the street, sped off on a motorcycle.

WHEN DECLAN FOGARTY FINALLY FIGURED OUT WHAT the numerals on the key-tags meant, he could have kicked himself for his stupidity. "Jeez, it was so simple. We used that very same code when we were kids to write secret messages. If I'd have seen it I'd have recognised it right away, but now, having to listen — it makes a big difference. Anyway, not to worry — the code is the alphabet backwards, you know. 1 is Z, 2 is Y, 3 is X, 4 is W, 5 is V and so forth all the way back to A which is 26."

As he was speaking, Maura found the pad on which she had written the first part of the code: D E L F T C H I N A and added the Alphabet. "So that makes E E A 8249 mean 2 2 0 S C R," she said.

Declan nodded. "That's right: two hundred and twenty South Circular Road. The next one on the tape was: D L H 79187 9 which becomes: 1 3 7 T R I T R or one hundred and thirty-seven Tritonville Road and so forth."

Later that week when Shay at last managed to get a call through to Dublin from Galway City it was well after midnight and he was too

aggravated and tired for the information that Declan had solved the code even to penetrate, let alone excite him. He didn't even pass a comment about Jilly O'Brien not having dropped by the house, though that might have been because of being grabbed into the Security guard for the visit of the American President. Half the police force and most of the army had been assigned to making certain nothing awkward occurred while Mr. and Mrs. Reagan were on Irish soil.

Two days before the scheduled festivities were to begin Shay had been one of those shipped west in case the numerous and vociferous protesters against the visit that were gravitating to Galway decided to cause trouble. Then, the morning the Reagans arrived, twenty guards including Shay Kelly were returned to Dublin where they joined forces with the lads in Phoenix Park who were there to make sure the anti-nuclear Green Peace ladies camped near the American Ambassador's Residency stayed peaceful.

ON MONDAY MORNING WHILE HIS HOUSE WAS BEING broken into and Jilly O'Brien's body was being fished out of the River Dodder, Shay again was shoulder to shoulder with hundreds of his peers making an official barricade between Leinster House and the eight or ten thousand protesters against Mr. Reagan and his Central American policies. No matter what, nothing untoward could be allowed to happen while The President of the United States made his speech in the Dail. As a matter of fact nothing could be allowed to happen of an unpleasant nature while he and his wife remained in Eire.

"They had to've been watching — "

"Declan's right, he and Mannix hadn't been gone two minutes before these two yokes wearing ski masks were in the back door," Maura interrupted. Although she was paler than usual, her hands were steady as she poured tea for the men grouped around the kitchen table: Detective Sergeant O'Malley, the fingerprint man whose name she never could remember, Liam O'Connor and blind Declan. Mannix eyed them with suspicion from his place near the stove beside the kitten.

Later, seated at the table with her own tea untouched, Maura repeated for the third time all she could recall about what had happened; Two men in ski masks burst in the back door. One was about five foot six, the other was about five foot nine. Both were wearing jeans, both were wearing T-shirts and she guessed they were between fifteen and eighteen years old, not from their voices, which they tried to disguise by speaking in falsetto. She judged they were young by the way they moved. Also, at a guess she felt it might be their first house-breaking.

She told how she had been tied to a kitchen chair with her mouth taped shut and locked in the box room off the kitchen. She didn't think much had been taken except the money from her purse and a bracelet she had intended taking to the jeweller's to have the catch fixed. It, too, had been in the purse.

"You'll probably find other things are missing when you have time to check and I'd say you're right about them being inexperienced. Usually in house-breakings the place is ransacked and everything portable removed. But except for a few drawers emptied out," Sgt. O'Malley shrugged. "And your TeeVee's still here."

"You know when I came home and heard that thumping, I thought they were hanging a picture next door. But Mannix knew exactly what was what, didn't you, boy?" Declan petted the big dog who had come over at the mention of his name. "He led me to the door and scratched until I unlocked it and went in. That's when my foot hit something soft."

"I managed to tip over the chair with all my thumping around," Maura repeated yet again when her husband came home. Almost overwhelmed by a feeling of frustration at not having been able to protect this girl he had loved for nearly fourteen years, Shay took her in his arms and held her close.

"They took the keys with the tags." Maura's voice was half smothered against the worsted stuff of his uniformed shoulder.

He stroked her hair. "And so what did O'Malley say when you told them about the keys?"

Maura moved away. "Come on, your tea's almost ready." She set the table with plates of cold meat and salad. "Look, Shay, I didn't mention them in case you'd be in trouble for not having turned them in." She went to the door and called Declan.

"It's on the news — about that girl, Jilly," Declan said after he was seated.

"News — Jilly?"

"Sorry — with all the flap here I just forgot." Her voice was filled with self accusation. "Jilly was found dead this morning. A man on his way to work saw her floating face down in the Dodder River not far from Ball's Bridge — Liam told me."

"Poor stupid little kid ran when she saw me — I even left a message for her at the school — Tuesday, I think it was."

"She probably never got it — she'd been missing, you see. When the O'Briens were told about the death they said she'd been missing for a week."

"Identification's positive?"

"It's positive alright: the name tags on her clothes, the silver necklace with her name spelled out in letters. And then both parents identified her body," Declan chimed in.

"I thought they both worked, isn't that what Jilly told you, Maura?"

"They do but they're on their holidays."

"You say Jilly was missing — was it reported?"

"Not at all, they were even upset about having a police car parked outside their house when they came about Jilly this morning. You know the kind, always worrying about what the neighbors will think." Maura reached across the table and took Shay's hand. "They said they hadn't been particularly worried about the child because, to quote them, 'Lots of kids stay out all night without calling home these days.' Oh Shay, how can people lucky enough to have children be so careless?"

THAT NIGHT IN THE BIG OLD BRASS BED WITH MAURA fast asleep beside him he thought about Declan's insistence that the tagged keys held the answer to everything. He thought about the clippings his wife had sorted out of the box of cat pictures. They had been divided between drug related crimes and burglaries one of which was about the pre-Christmas break-in at 1327 Tritonville Road, to which house one of the tagged keys belonged. He thought about Jilly and wondered if her death, too, would be put on the long finger like poor little Sinead Sullivan, The Cat Woman.

Carefully, Kelly slipped out of bed and padded barefoot to the kitchen, stopping on the way to pick up the clippings and the list of addresses translated from the code on Declan's cassette. He filled a glass with milk from the refrigerator and, having taken his notebook and ballpoint out of his tunic pocket, he sat down at the kitchen table to try to figure out a starting point.

There's one dead old lady, one dead girl, eleven keys — *were* eleven keys, he amended mentally, and the clippings. He laid the clippings out, wishing that little Miss Sullivan had been into datelines. As it was, only two articles had been fortunate enough to have been printed beneath the date — one was the Tritonville Road robbery and the other was about an overdose victim.

"You know I've been thinking, love, why don't we stay right here instead of going to London next week?" Maura had come into the kitchen so quietly he wasn't aware she was standing beside him until she spoke.

"Oh, you startled me. Sit down, pet — look at this — " he put the two clippings together. "Now, I know this first one about everything

movable being taken out of 137 Tritonville Road happened last December when I was away on duty — ”

“One of those huge moving vans pulled up in front of the place a couple weeks before Christmas and moved the lot. Mrs. Finnegan who lives next door questioned the moving men but they said the McDonnells were moving house to Naas or somewhere,” Maura interrupted.

“Yeah well, look at this one dated 23 December 1983.”

Kevin McDonnell, 16, was found dead from an overdose of heroin by his sister, Mary, 12. He was the only son of Michael and Nualla McDonnell, whose house was burglarised early last week. The remains will be removed to the Star of The Sea Church this evening.

“Is it coincidence or is his death somehow related to the burglary?” Shay continued after reading the article out loud. “And where would I begin, Maura — what you said a few minutes ago about London, it’s only a week but I know how you’ve been looking forward to us getting away for a little holiday. So why don’t I do what I can until Friday, then take up where I left off when we get back? Or, better yet, you could go on ahead and I could meet you over there.”

“It would be a waste — I wouldn’t enjoy going without you and you’d be a pain with this on your mind — especially since Jilly. And anyway, it’s us being together that counts — not where we are.”

“Thanks, pet.” Shay kissed her in an absent-minded way. “Yeah, first thing I better get on to burglary.”

After itemising the reasons why she never would do anything what-so-ever to help him again as long as she lived, Ban Garda Mary Mullins took down the eleven addresses Shay had copied from the tags on the keys. “In case I should go mad and change my mind,” she added before slamming the phone down.

WHEN KELLY GOT HOME THAT EVENING FOOTSORE FROM walking round and round the Irishtown/Sandymount beat, Maura told him that Mary Mullins had called and left a message to tell him that every one of the addresses had been robbed. Every one of them cleaned out just like Tritonville Road.

“I told you it was the keys,” Declan said after washing down a mouthful of porkchop and French fries with a half a cup of scalding coffee.

"According to this," Shay waved the written message, "keys wouldn't be much help on their own. In every case the houses had an alarm system installed as well as a dead lock. All this besides the ordinary everyday mortise lock which is the only key they had — for all the good that one would do anyone all by itself. To get in, if the house was properly locked without damaging the door, the burglars would have to have a key to open the dead lock and switch off the alarm within forty-five seconds. And it definitely was switched off in all cases because no alarm was registered from any of the houses at the time of the robberies."

"That means whoever they were they knew exactly where the off-switch was."

"You're right, Declan, and as Security Firms put them in all kinds of strange places — " Shay spread his hands and shrugged.

"An inside job," the blind man agreed.

"For the insurance," Maura topped up the teacups.

"It's possible but arson is more the norm for insurance frauds. However, it's a starting point — check out any liquidations on the businesses of the burglarized householders — if any."

A MORNING SPENT IN COURT AND AN UPSURGE IN VANDALISM, shoplifting and muggings with the resultant paper-work swept away the rest of the week. And if Maura hadn't decided to get the Number 3 bus for the City Centre where she spent most of Friday at the Company's Office in Dublin Castle, nothing further would have been accomplished.

"Anyway, you were so busy and I knew you wanted to get on with it so I phoned Mary Mullins and told her that you wanted the business names and addresses of each of the burglarized houses. Then I went down to that stupid office and took out the folders one at a time like the sign says, paid the fee and then there was that awful wait for the photo copier each time. I thought I'd never get out of there," Maura said as Shay leafed through the pile of documents."

"Well, this lot has no financial problems, so that rules out insurance fraud. With three living in Killiney, two in Blackrock, three in Ballsbridge and one in Booterstown they probably have solid gold bath plugs."

"You forgot the one on Tritonville Road."

"Not really, that's the one that puzzles me. I know McDonnell and he's not a rich man, far from it. He's an accountant. He has an office on Lower Abbey Street and a couple of men working for him but it's only a tiny office and not posh at all."

"So cross insurance off your list." Shay drew his brows down and, with exaggerated gestures, he took out his notebook and crossed off the first item. Maura laughed and ruffled his hair. "Go play with Mannix," she said.

Shay noticed the girl in the belted T-shirt dress standing near the sidewalk watching the big Alsatian chase the ball across the grass and onto the sand. She was young and something about her was familiar. He ran her through his mental computer to see if he could come up with a name. Glancing over again he saw she had drifted nearer as though wanting to speak to him. Shay teased the ball away from a mouthful of growls wondering if he should call her over but when he looked up she was gone. It was then that he recalled having collared her along with a pimply faced youth peddling drugs in Sandymount Green.

He had been in court when the judge handed down a three month suspended sentence. At the time Shay wondered whether the slap-on-the-wrist reprimand had been administered because it had been a first offense or if the social position of the family had been considered. If he recalled rightly, the girl's father and the Judge were golfing chums.

Shay's long legs devoured the distance from The Strand to the lane-way, that cut through to Tritonville Road. "Okay, Mannix, go home." He handed the big dog the ball and watched until he disappeared at the corner.

"Thought you were on holiday, Kelly," Brady the new uniform fresh from Templemore, the Police Training Academy, said looking up from his crossword puzzle.

"I am o'course 'til Monday week." Shay crossed to the files. "Just thought I'd do some paper work, like dishes — get it over with so's you don't have to come home to a sink full — if you get my meaning." Brady nodded without looking up. "I'm taking this folder into the back office and —" Shay paused in the doorway. "No need to mention it to the Sarge, okay?" Brady nodded again.

Beneath a dangling 100 watt bulb, Kelly checked the "rap" sheet on the Sandymount Green Drug Bust — if arresting two scared kids trying to peddle cannabis in a broadly furtive manner as though, sub-consciously, they wanted to be caught could be called a drug bust.

The girl, Sandra Kenny, lived on Booterstown Avenue and the lad, Bill Ryan was from Blackrock. Both addresses given had been burgled. Both had duplicate tagged keys.

Kelly's next port of call was the Pearse Street Library, home of the newspaper archives, where he read up on each of the robberies on his list. He was searching for a pattern, a common denominator that might point him in the direction of whoever masterminded "Pantecnicon

Clean-outs" as the newspapers had dubbed the burglaries. He found two vague possibilities: 1) Every family had at least one child between the age of seventeen and twenty-two, the respective ages of Sandra Kenny and Bill Ryan. 2) each inventory of items stolen catalogued antiques of great value purchased when the contents of Rathkill Castle had gone on the auction block in October 1983. With this information neatly recorded in his notebook, Shay thanked the pleasant, helpful librarian and set off on foot for Pearse Street Garda Station where, preferring the comfort of a car to his Honda 50, he borrowed a hatch-back from the Desk Sergeant.

FIFTY-FIVE MINUTES LATER HE TURNED LEFT OFF THE Navan Road into a tree-lined avenue signposted: RATHKILL CASTLE. For awhile he thought some prankster had moved the signs and he was on the wrong road, no turrets or battlements showed above the oaks as he recalled they had the summer before when he had taken Maura to a Pop Concert on the castle grounds. A moment later, on rounding a curve, the trees swept away on either side to reveal a veritable beehive of activity with men swarming over what looked to be a vast pile of weathered stones. Rathkill Castle was being dismantled into blocks, each bearing a number painted on in white, some of which were being lashed to pallettes for loading onto flatbed trucks by busy little forklifts.

As Shay slowed to a stop, a man wearing a yellow hard-hat moved in front of the car arms outstretched to bar the way. "Move on, Mac," he shouted. Ignoring the suggestion, Kelly began to climb out. "Move it, Mac, unless you want we should move it for you." A gesture brought four crow-bar bearing heavies into the picture.

"Don't get your knickers in a twist, fella, I'm with the Garda Siochana." Shay flashed his identity badge. "We got a complaint about the illegal removal of — "

"Yeah, I believe that like I believe in Santa Claus! I'll give you a count of ten to get that heap out of here. One — two — three — " As the Desk Sergeant at Pearse Street wouldn't appreciate having his almost new car rearranged by the pattering of metal bars, Shay swung around and left the way he had come. Half a mile along he braked to jot down the license number of the nearest truck. It was an Ulster registration.

A mile further on he pulled up in front of a pub to make two phone calls. The first was to the Drogheda police to report the imminent removal of Rathkill Castle. The second was to Customs at the Ulster border in case the trucks were going to head home to Belfast. Admittedly it

was a rather pointless exercise because of the plethora of unattended, unapproved roads that dot the impossibly long border, but he felt better for having made the gesture. Had it not been Saturday he would have phoned An Taisce, the organization dedicated to the preservation of all buildings of historical interest. Hopefully, when they were contacted Monday morning, they would get an injunction against whoever was trying to make off with the castle.

Kelly's next stop was at Slane Castle where Sothebys, the famous London Auctioneers, had put the contents of Rathkill Castle on the block. Here, too, he found the welcome somewhat lacking in cordiality until sight of his identification sent the grey-suited custodian of the other office scurrying up a copy of the auction catalogue. Satisfied that some progress had been made, Shay Kelly pointed the hatchback toward Dublin.

THE PALE, STRUNG-OUT GIRL WHO OPENED THE DOOR next morning at the Booterstown Avenue address bore little resemblance to the Sandra Kenny Shay had seen the day before on Sandymount Strand. For a moment she squinted up at him before recognition drew her eyebrows together in a frown. "Get your stupid foot out of the door and leave me alone," she shouted, infuriated by the sight of the leather jacketed Guard wearing motorcycle helmet and gauntlets. She slammed the door against his foot and, after aiming a few kicks at his leg, the girl burst into tears and would have collapsed if Kelly had not caught her.

"Easy, love, I think you'd better sit down before you fall down. He lifted her up and carried her through an open door into a living room whose sparse scattering of furniture looked shabby in comparison with the heavy gold satin that bracketed the windows and the elegant marble fireplace. Undoubtedly this was where the Kennys had exhibited their Rathkill treasures before they had been stolen away.

"What are you on?" Shay asked after he had the girl settled on a maroon leather couch. In answer Sandra cursed him and turned away. "Look I've seen enough youngsters in your condition to know you're on drugs." He shoved up her sleeve to reveal needle tracks on her arm. "I'll get on to Father Jack; he'll know what to do." While speaking Shay crossed to the telephone table and dialed the number of the hostel named "HELP." Father Jack Rielly ran it practically single handed except for a few volunteers who were dedicated to reclaiming drugs-lost youngsters and assisting them until they were able to stand on their own feet once more.

Three hours later, after a stop at the Jervis Street Hospital Drug

Unit, Sandra was tucked up in bed fast asleep in the hospital room at HELP HOSTEL. "There was no way that she could go cold turkey on her own; that's what she wanted to do. Anyway, they fixed me up at Jervis Street so's I can care for her until there's a bed free. After a few weeks care there, Sandra can come here to stay until she feels she can make it on her own," Father Jack told Shay over mugs of coffee and thick-cut brown bread and butter.

"What about her parents?" Shay asked the tousled young priest whose track suit underlined his conviction that a clerical collar would only get in the way as far as helping young addicts was concerned.

"They're glad enough she's going to get the help she needs. They were shocked, of course, when we reached them on the phone in Geneva where they are holidaying from making money. Sandra's been on her own as far as family is concerned for years — that's how things like this can happen. She was lonely and got this letter saying Glitters, the Disco on Leeson Street, was opening a leisure club for a selected group of Dublin students. They had all kinds of video games and dances and drugs, of course, so she went along as did the other kids whose houses were burgled — "

"But how did those yokes who ran the place get the keys off them?"

"Easy enough, when the kids were hooked on free heroin and needed a fix, the payment demanded was the front door key which was duplicated and returned. Then, when the parents of one or another of them was out of town for the weekend, the youngster who generally was left behind, was instructed to make sure the alarms were switched off and the dead-lock was left unlocked. Having done this, the boy or girl was told to go and stay with a friend."

"And while the house was empty the movers came, opened the door with the duplicate key and cleaned out the place." Father Jack nodded. "But it doesn't make sense. If my guess is correct, the thieves were after the Rathkill Castle antiques. Admittedly they are very desirable but no fence in his right mind would touch them with a ten foot pole — "

"If all they wanted was the Rathkill stuff, why take everything lock, stock and barrel? The time involved — the chance of being caught. More coffee?"

Shay shook his head. "It didn't take as long as if they'd given the moving men a list of the wanted pieces. People who fancy antiques often collect similar objects — one would look pretty much like another to the layman. About the student's club at Glitters, she didn't happen to mention the name of the person running it?"

"No, I've just listened to anything she wanted to tell me — she's not able for questions yet."

"You're right o'course not to press her, but did you manage to find out why Sandra wanted to talk to me yesterday?"

"Umm, it was about Jilly O'Brien. Sandra is sure the girl was murdered. So when she read in the morning paper that no foul play was suspected in connection with her friend's being drowned, she needed to talk to someone. As Jilly had given you the box with the keys, naturally you came to mind. She drove around the village and saw Liam O'Connor who told her where you were. But when she saw you she got cold feet — afraid someone might be watching."

"With the huge generation gap between fourteen and seventeen, it's surprising they were friends." Shay stretched out his legs, crossing them at the ankle.

"When Sandra was doing a line with Jilly's brother a kind of sisterly relationship developed. In any case when the old Cat Woman was killed, the child ran straight to the Kenny girl and told her what she knew — "

"Which was — ?" Shay uncrossed his ankles and leaned forward.

"It seems that one rainy night Miss Sullivan was out trying to round up all her cats about to have kittens and she went down the laneway behind those boarded up sheds near her cottage. And much to her surprise she saw this great wide open door. She heard mewing and went inside what looked to be a furniture warehouse. Though she was surprised at finding such a place in the neighborhood it was cats she was looking for so when she found one had already had kittens in a cardboard box, she carried the lot home — box and all. Eventually she found some keys in the bottom. Sandra decided they must be the duplicate keys."

"So I'd say Sandra put the wind up her. That would explain why Jilly avoided me those last few days." Shay glanced at his watch. "It's getting late — mind if I make a phone call before I go?"

Rising, Father Jack bobbed his head toward the telephone. "As soon as she's up to it, I'll get out the hose pipe and give her the third degree," he said in broad Bogart just before disappearing into the next room to check on Sandra.

A CALL TO THE DRUG SQUAD OFFICE IN DUBLIN CASTLE found out Billy Doyle was not on duty so Shay Honda-ed over to his friend's flat in Dartmouth Square where the young man who opened the door told him that Billy had gone to Searson's Pub on Baggot Street. Sure enough, Shay spotted him at a table in the rear reading the Sunday Independent.

"So here you are! I hope I'm not breaking something up," Shay

indicated the full pint of stout across from Doyle's half empty one.

"Yours, me boyo. Cathal, the lad you talked to at the flats, phoned to warn me that a big 'Culchie' riding a baby bike was on his way over — just in case I wished to beat a hasty retreat. Park it." He reached a long leg under the table and pushed out the chair. Kelly stripped off the motorcycle gear before dropping down on the offered seat.

"Now that narcotics are involved you're the man I need. It's about this crazy thing — " Shay began without any preamble and, except for the occasional sip of stout, he didn't stop talking until he had brought his friend up to date.

"About the warehouse — you say you looked in the laneway — did you see anything that looked as though it might be — "

"No, I told you everything."

"Look, what about I get on to the Drugs Unit in Belfast, they'll alert all exits, Border and otherwise. Next, I'll just drop in on Glitters Sunday afternoon Jazz Session — nothing official o'course. Then, after 6:30 Mass I'll come around to your place and let Maura feed me."

FULL OF MAURA'S COLD CUTS, POTATO SALAD AND HOME-made soda bread as well as the new-found knowledge that Glitters was closed up tighter than a drum, Shay, Billy and Declan, attached to Mannix, adjourned to the laneway behind the Cat Woman's cottage. They examined the ground but all signs of traffic near the wall had been smoothed away by recent rain. However, close examination showed that the bricked up area had been covered with excellent quality slabs of antiqued brick siding which matched the "bricks" used to block up the windows. Finished there, they went around to the front of the terrace of houses where a huge weathered sign announced that the little row of buildings was being converted into apartments. Beneath an almost illegible intertwining of the initials U.H.C. followed by: Construction Company, Ltd. they read:

Utilising the gracious facade of this prestige terrace, we are pleased to offer the most modern one and two bedroom apartments available in Dublin.
Completion date July 1984.

Several red on yellow SOLD signs showed in well separated windows.

"How's a little house-breaking strike you?" Shay suggested as he looked right and left along the deserted street facing the River Dodder.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk, in broad daylight?" Billy's face was a picture of shocked horror as he ran up the steps of the first house and tried the

door only to find it locked. "You have a file, Kelly?"

"No — how are you with credit cards?" He handed him the plastic oblong.

Inside, the houses had been gutted into one huge area with walls and ceiling supported by an inadequate number of girders. When the switch by the door was flipped on, fifty or so 100 watt bulbs glared down from wires strung from one upright to another. "Well I'll be damned, the old Cat Woman was right, it does look like a furniture warehouse." Doyle stared open mouthed, astonished at the clutter of once elegant furnishings heaped around the place.

"You and Mannix better stay outside, Declan, the floor is a sea of broken glass, mirror and otherwise," Shay warned his friend as a grinding metallic noise opened a wide section of the wall facing on the laneway. Quickly he crossed to the rear of the building where Doyle stood looking smug.

"Just like my garage door — see?" He pressed a button and the "door" lowered itself into place. "All nicely camouflaged with brick siding."

"I'll get on to the Planning Permission yokes first thing tomorrow morning, find out just who applied for permission to convert and have them slap a violation order on these buildings — the whole thing could fall down any minute."

"Yeah, nothing more can be done tonight, Kelly, except go get a pint at Clark's," Doyle said taking a final look around. "Thirsty business breaking and entering."

BUT THE EVENING DID NOT END WITH A PINT AT CLARK'S. Liam O'Connor was there and the men got to talking about the castle and the warehouse, Sandra and eventually Glitters, at which point Shay fingered his credit card, rose and shoved his way through the crowded bar to the door.

"You got it," Doyle said as they headed back to Tritonville Road to pick up his car, grateful that the glare of the low-hanging sun was at their backs.

"What about us?" Declan wondered not unlike a child about to be sent off to bed.

"Pile in the back with Liam, you two can be our lookout." Shay and Billy grinned at each other — with the blind man's hearing and the big dog's eyes nothing could slip past them.

The front door of Glitters was secured by chains, an iron bar and three padlocks but oddly, a small door at the side was equipped with only a lock . . . eminently vulnerable to credit cards. The men filed

through the door and found themselves in a long hall with a staircase at the rear. A curtained entrance on the right opened into a vast hall empty of everything except shadows created by the pale late summer day that filtered through a dirty skylight three stories above.

"Looks as though they've scarpered, bag and baggage." Liam O'Connor walked the length of the room. "They even took the parquet squares that was the dance floor — those that weren't stuck down too well."

"I was here a couple weeks ago checking the area for known pushers, it was going full steam ahead then — let's see what's up above." Shay and Liam followed him upstairs where, besides the toilets, they found a door labeled: DUBLIN STUDENTS CLUB. Here, too, everything had been removed except a sprung daybed covered with a sleeping bag and a low table upon which sat a Camp-Gaz stove, some tea bags, a mug and half a loaf of reasonably fresh bread. A rucksack lay on its frame nearby. The only other thing in the room was black plastic rubbish bag propped in the corner near the window.

"What's your guess? Caretaker? Squatter?" Doyle shrugged in answer to Shay's question as a series of barks sent the three men scrambling down the stairs. There in the entry Mannix was impressing the merits of staying put on a red-thatched young man who cowered against the wall.

"He passed me on the footpath, then we heard him fooling with the door," Declan exclaimed. Mannix, satisfied that he had done his duty, returned to his master's side while the slender man, who appeared to be in his mid-twenties, explained that he meant no harm he just needed a place to sleep.

"When Glitters closed down it seemed a good place — you see I worked here at the wine bar — I still have a key so it's really not breaking in, Mr. Doyle." Surprise showed on Billy's face at being called by name. "You were around often enough, not in here maybe but along The Strip — everyone knows who you are." He then told them his name was Martin O'Hara and that until Glitters closed he had lived in the box room at the end of the hall, at which time he moved his bed and table into the larger room where he hoped to stay until he found another job. "Is it alright I go up now?" He edged toward the small side door. Doyle checked the man's pockets. "I'm not carrying anything, if that's what you're thinking." O'Hara held his arms wide. "You'll find identification in my shirt pocket — driver's license, credit cards, the usual — "

Billy Doyle flipped through the card case before handing it back. "Okay, go upstairs — but remember, be here if I need to contact you."

THOUGH KELLY TOOK HOME THE PLASTIC BAG FOR SORTING, he had no idea of what to look for. Besides which, a sinking feeling roiled the pit of his stomach. Twice before the horrid pang had come, both times he had chased after a case until an impenetrable stone wall blocked the path whichever way he turned.

But the feeling notwithstanding, first thing Monday morning Kelly's Honda was parked outside An Taisce where the woman in charge assured him she was well aware of Rathkill Castle's change in ownership. While speaking she opened a folder and flipped through until the page desired was found. "Here it is; Rathkill Castle sold to the United Holding Company Incorporated with offices in Delaware and Liechtenstein." The woman closed the folder and returned to the typewriter.

She lost her cool somewhat when informed that Rathkill Castle was in the last stages of being dismantled and spirited away on flat bed trucks and, within seconds, was on the phone. "We'll put a stop to that! Thanks for letting us know," she called as the door closed on Shay Kelly.

At the Planning Permission Office where every alteration or building plan must be approved, he ascertained that United Holdings owned the Sandymount terrace of houses as well. Said buildings had been authorized for conversion into modern apartments for sale on or about July 1984. Again consternation and disbelief met Kelly's mention of the gutted buildings' imminent collapse.

From there he piloted his cycle through heavy traffic to the Company's Office at Dublin Castle where he photocopied the contents of United Holdings' folder. Besides Glitters and the Development Company which listed the Georgian terrace and Rathkill Castle as assets, United Holdings included the Intercontinental Trucking Company, Ltd. None of the registrations named Directors other than the usual accommodation signatures of the solicitor's employees pending the assignment of proper Directorships and Secretary, etc.

Shay dumped a handful of photocopies on Billy Doyle's desk. "Something to read while I get on to Hanlon Partners, Ltd., the solicitor who handled United Holdings' transactions." He picked up the telephone and dialed Directory Inquiries only to find the number had been disconnected. Further investigation disclosed the facts that Hanlon Partners, an old and respected law firm, had been taken over recently by two young lawyers who had scarpered. Nor was there jot or tittle at any of the listed premises to suggest that any such company as United Holdings had ever existed. Even the addresses given in Delaware and Liechtenstein were for accommodation only.

The householders who had been burgled were notified by the Garda Siochana that they had five days in which to collect whatever furnishings they recognised as belonging to them. By the end of the month the little Georgian Terrace was bulldozed into a pile of rubble.

In a clearing reached by a tree-lined avenue untidy piles of stones, some numbered, some not, represented all that was left of Rathkill Castle. Martin O'Hara had been questioned extensively at Pearse Street Station and Irishtown as well as by Billy Doyle at the Drugs Unit in Dublin Castle but no connection could be found with United Holdings beyond having been an employee of Glitters where he still lived despite having landed a job at a Baggot Street Pub. As he had a key and the lease continued until the 31st of December there was no reason why he shouldn't stay right where he was.

As far as the Intercontinental Trucking Company was concerned, all leased vehicles had been returned to their home base in Belfast. There was no trace of the Rathkill antiques. Even Sandra Kenny shed no light on the subject.

She described a man named Bob Purdy who was the organizer of the Dublin Student's Club but Purdy, like everyone else involved with United Holdings, was nowhere to be found. When questioned about being brought in on a drugs charge, the girl insisted she had been selling for a fellow student who had a cannabis plantation somewhere near Sally's Gap. When asked to give his name she shrugged and said he no longer lived in the Republic so his name was of no importance. However, a search of the area revealed a large garden of cannabis surrounded by wild growth that might have kept it undiscovered for years. Newspaper interest dwindled out of existence. The police files were shunted to one side and finally out of sight by the ever burgeoning folders filled with more recent crimes. So there it was — the dead end Shay had feared.

After three months, half of which was spent at Father Jack's HELP HOSTEL, Sandra Kenny was packed off to Donegal to stay with relatives. Days shorted. The Networks became infested with Christmas musts, mostly for children, and the criminal element sought easy pickings for Holiday spending money — the rural pensioner. For the first time fear and death made itself known in isolated areas heretofore untouched by urban crime.

THEN ONE COLD, DAMP MONDAY NIGHT DECLAN SHOUTED for Maura and Shay to hurry in to the living room. "It's a special program coming after the news. Hurry!" he shouted so excited that Tidbit was startled awake as Mannix launched into a series of barks.

"'Spats' Lonigan died — you know, the American Gangster. I guess you don't remember much of what happened in 1956 but the minute Cockburn, the News Man, said he'd died I remembered the whole thing. Anyway, he was born here."

After the usual quota of commercials, a snapshot of a young boy flashed on screen while a voice over told how Donal "Spats" Lonigan, born in Cavan on March 12th, 1906, had emigrated to America where he followed a career in the Underworld that rivalled Al Capone for notoriety and continued into the early 1980's. A series of clips from newsreels showed him as a handsome, sharply-dressed young man shaking hands with New York Mayor Jimmy Walker; at the races, his wedding; the funerals of several of his peers; when he was freed on charges of Income Tax Evasion, all the while the voice chattered on.

Then a new face came on screen, that of the late Lord William Dunleavy of Rathkill Castle. The year was 1956 and Donal Lonigan had returned to Ireland to seek the title he claimed as his birthright. The noble Lord, a confirmed bachelor had died without issue unless Lonigan's claim was substantiated: that of being the natural son of William Dunleavy and Noleen Shanaghan, the daughter of a Publican in Cavan Town. Although his resemblance to Lord Dunleavy was uncanny and his proof of parentage incontravertible, his claim was disallowed by the stodgy solicitors, Hanlon Partners, on the grounds that his unsavory lifestyle and Naturalization as an American precluded his ever becoming a peer. The title languished and the property, including Rathkill Castle, passed to a distant female relative who sold it to an American millionaire.

"A number of properties that once belonged to the Dunleavy Estate have been in the news recently, among them a Georgian Terrace that recently was razed in Sandymount, the building that housed the now defunct Glitters Disco and, of course, Rathkill Castle itself." Various photographs of the properties illustrated the commentary. At the end the last known interview with Lonigan was shown. It had been filmed late in May 1984.

Made at his estate just outside Rio di Janeiro, it showed a wasted figure crouched in a wheelchair whose eyes burned with triumph as he announced the transporting of Rathkill Castle to Brazil where it would be reassembled. When the interviewer suggested that it was a form of vandalism to remove an historical landmark from its own country, Lonigan's face twisted with fury. His attendant, identified as Robert Purdy, unsuccessfully tried to calm the old man.

"The damned thing's mine, it's my birthright and none of the historical crap William Randolph Hearst carted off on whim was criti-

cized. No one yelled 'foul' when London Bridge was transferred and what about the Queen Mary? No one raised eyebrows at those little vandalisms, yet here you are slanging me for merely claiming what is rightfully mine. Well, let me tell you, you nor nobody else is going to stop me from having my castle. Do you hear me — nothing can stop me now!" "Spats" enraged face faded to be replaced by a photograph of him as a youth.

"Donal 'Spats' Lonigan suffered a stroke when informed that An Taisce had sought and received an injunction against the removal of Rathkill Castle. A second paralising stroke followed from which he never recovered," the commentator concluded.

Maura rose and switched off the set.

"Well, that answers a lot of questions — poor old Hanlon Partners. He certainly was a vengeful man." Shay didn't move, he just sat staring at the blank screen, thinking about the destruction of lives and property one man could cause. "He sure managed to get his own back," he said following Maura and Declan into the kitchen.

"Not really he didn't — poor old wreck," she filled the kettle and set it on the stove to heat. "Did you hear him shouting that nobody was going to stop him from having his castle. Did you hear the conceit of the man? Well, Mafia Don he may have been, but he had no way of knowing my Garda Seamus Kelly was on his case."

●

MYSTERY MINIQUIZ

Who was Dan Briggs?

On TV's "Mission Impossible" he was the original chief agent, played by Stephen Hill.

Who was the leader of a group that included Ham, Monk, Renny and Long Tom?

From the pulps it was Doc Savage.

What famous villain was created by Arthur Sarsfield Ward?

Writing as Sax Rohmer, he created Dr. Fu Manchu.

MYSTERY MINIQUIZ

The two men had been caught red-handed stripping the house. They'd committed similar crimes before, but there was an added element this time — a dead body!

The Pattern Of His Death

by ISAK ROMUN

IT'S NEVER GOOD NEWS WHEN YOU HEAR OF A LIFE ENDING before it's had a chance to really get started.

This story dates back to my early days with *The Paulsburg Advance-Indicator*. I was young then, very young, years away from writing features. I was a legman nosing out news in the counties around Paulsburg. Tuttey was the largest of them and the place I spent most of my time. It was watched over by Sheriff Oscar Roche, with whom I shared the same first name. I had done him a favor when he closed down the Dressner-Semple moonshine ring and if something was doing in the county I usually got to hear of it before the competition.

That Saturday morning, something was doing. I drove up to the county office building in time to see a Sheriff's Department car, flasher going, jackrabbit out of the parking lot and speed down the road toward open country. I had a chance to recognize Roche behind the wheel.

I started up my car and pulled out hoping to keep him in sight but not sure I could because he had a wild hand on the wheel and a heavy foot on the gas. In a little while though he left the paved highway and raced onto an unpaved access road. There were few trees around and I had a clear view of the dust cloud made by the speeding car. I reduced speed and just kept my eye on the dust. In a few minutes, the cloud diminished, a sign of slowing down. Shortly, I saw the car pull up into one of those long farm drives and move toward a two-story frame house dropped down amidst fields of corn.

There was a graveness about the house, adrift there in a crushing sea of green. Its front windows were closed, thick drapes drawn on each, and I remember thinking they would be locked, too. Rockers were on

the porch, turned and tipped against the wall to keep rainwater off their seats. The front door was open. The line of the house seemed to uphold feebly a lowering sky blotched about with rainseed clouds. The wind was vaguely restive. As I came near I saw chipping paint on wood siding, and a tin roof with wounds of rust.

A large moving van, with no identifying lettering on its panels, was backed up to the porch. Two men were on the porch, each handcuffed to a post. I recognized one of them: Wendell Brodie, a perennial offender who doggedly worked Tuttey County for the best part of two decades, with time off for bad behavior in one jail or another. The other man, really a boy, I didn't know, but saw collected in his face the slivered nose, indeterminate chin, and bulging, guileless eyes of his older companion. Roche's car was drawn up next to another cop car, this one with a dead flasher. Roche stood near the van talking to the arresting deputy.

As I got out of my car, I heard Roche saying, "I didn't take you off that switchboard and put you in uniform so you could get yourself killed."

"You've got to let me take the same chances—"

The deputy raised a finger to alert Roche of my approach. The sheriff turned, and said, "Monahan! This the only county you cover?"

"Only one where anything happens." I nodded toward the porch. "That's the famous house-stripping gang?"

Roche scratched his head. "Looks that way. Met my new deputy?"

I looked at the deputy who, only the week before, made me a cup of coffee and put a call through to my editor for me. I said, "Hello, Helen."

HELEN LUTSON WAS A RARITY FOR THAT TIME, A WOMAN cop. She was a rarity in any case, combining brains and fresh-scrubbed country good looks. A russet blonde, she had fine features, and a nice shape the uniform did everything it could to hide. She was high-cheeked, and her nose turned up just a bit. When you saw her, the word "perky" came to mind only to be abandoned when you looked into her dark-brown eyes. A perky person doesn't have eyes like that. They were soft and expressive, but nonetheless could look at you with a no-nonsense intensity that ate you up until there was nothing left on the plate.

She was a serious, not solemn, girl. After high school, she went to work for Roche as his switchboard operator and dispatcher. She attended Paulsburg College at night, studied hard, and was now a handful of credits away from her degree with a major in police science. On

her twenty-first birthday, Roche didn't hesitate to appoint her to a vacancy I suspect he had been holding open for her.

And now, less than seven days after her appointment, she had her first big bust, something a rookie might wait years for.

If she was impressed with her achievement, she did nothing to show it, including answering my greeting (which would have given me the opportunity to ask some newsman-type questions). Instead, she looked closely at Roche trying to get his attention as he talked with me.

"Sheriff," she said finally, "there's more inside."

"You did good, Helen, but we better leave the place to the technicians. They'll be along soon to take shots and dust around some."

"No. Please come inside first."

"Can I come?" I asked.

"No!" This was Helen.

Roche came in on my side. "Come on, Helen, Monahan's almost like family."

This was a coy jab at both of us. I had asked Helen out a number of times and each time was turned down. Roche read into this more than there was to read, thus the "family" comment.

Helen shrugged in a you're-the-boss way and we moved toward the porch. Once on it, Roche looked at Brodie and then at the kid. Then he looked back to the older man and said, "The going concern of Brodie and Son, eh? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Wendell." The sheriff turned to Helen. "Lead on."

HELEN TOOK US THROUGH THE DOORWAY. AS I WENT through, I noticed the door was splintered around its lock. The entranceway and the living room beyond didn't look too badly stripped. Roche noticed this and said, "I hope they got some stuff in that van before you pinched 'em."

"They did — a radio console, a few chairs, small stuff like vases — but that doesn't matter."

"What's that mean?"

"We have to go to the kitchen."

We went down a corridor, through a small utility room, and into the kitchen at the back of the house. It was efficient looking. Everything was well organized and in its place. Two freshly laundered dish towels hung, in serene folds, from a rack. Twin sinks gleamed. The curtains were pulled back in here and the room was filled with shifting gray light. It was a largish room, as farm kitchens tend to be. Like most old frame houses, particularly those that used to have servants, there was a narrow, closed stairway leading to the upper floor.

The body was sprawled at the foot of the stairs, its legs upon the bottom steps, its arms out from the trunk and angled like a fallen marionette's. A loose black scarf was around the neck. The cloth was folded about twice over, resembling a band, and the ends knotted. Above the scarf, the head was turned so you could see the face, that of a young boy, a teenager. His mouth was open as if at the last he had let out a despairing yell. The head was covered with bruises, probably sustained falling down the stairs.

"I radioed for an ambulance," Helen said, "but he's dead."

Roche said, "All right, Helen, let me have it all."

"The boy is Norman Kyle. I used to work here for Hannah, Mrs. Kyle. I don't know where she is. His father's in an out-of-state hospital for an eye operation. A serious operation. Norman must have been here by himself and they — " she frowned toward the front of the house " — they came upon him, gagged him, and did what they did."

"And what's that?"

"It's as fair as your hand. Either they threw him down the stairs or he broke away from them and fell down. The gag, that black cloth, must have worked loose or been pulled loose in the fall, then dropped down around his neck. Take your pick: murder or manslaughter."

"I pick manslaughter," Roche said. "Brodie's a pain, but he's not cold-blooded killer. One time he drew down on a guy and when the so-called victim wouldn't hand over his wallet, Wendell just walked away. Didn't lay a finger on him."

All this time I had my notebook out taking everything down. I said to Helen, "Tell me something about him."

"Only child. A nice young man. Good student, but selective. Good in English, barely holding on in math. Had a lot of interests, but his main one was writing. He wanted to be a writer."

"Who doesn't," I said.

WE WERE INTERRUPTED BY SOUNDS AT THE FRONT OF the house. More cars had driven up. And an ambulance. We went out to the living room and Roche talked to the technicians, photographer, and about three or four more deputies who had arrived. Jake Caudle, Roche's chief deputy, was among them. The medical examiner, John Matthis, was there and after a few words with the sheriff brushed past us and went into the kitchen.

Outside, Jake Caudle had handcuffed the Brodies together and hustled them into a cage at the back of Roche's car. Roche came over to Helen and me.

"I'm going back with Jake," he told Helen. "It's your case, Deputy

Lutson. The other boys know that." He gave me a glance. "Treat Monahan here with kindness."

After Roche left, a deputy came in with a white-haired woman who wore a willow-print dress and a worried look on her gullied face. She surveyed us with anxious, indrawn blue eyes framed in networks of tiny wrinkles.

"Mrs. Butterfield, Helen," the deputy said. "The kid was staying with her. Saw the cars from the road when she was passing and wondered what was going on."

Helen sent the deputy back outside, eased Mrs. Butterfield into a chair, and gave her the bad news. Then I was sent for a glass of water.

When the old woman settled down, Helen asked, "Why was the Kyle boy staying with you, Mrs. Butterfield?"

"His mother went to be with Thick until he got through his operation. It was school and, besides, some things had to be done around here, so Norman stayed. But Hannah didn't want to leave him alone, so he stayed with us."

"Is that your house about three miles down the county road? I used to pass it on my way up here."

"Their nearest neighbor. Norman would bicycle up in the morning and afternoon to do his chores here. Even today."

"Why *even* today, Mrs. Butterfield?"

"The operation didn't work," the woman said in a strangulated voice. "Hannah called last night from the hospital. Thick is blind, and Hannah says he'll be that way probably the rest of his life. Norman seemed calm about the news, but I thought he was holding it all in. I told him I'd send Chris — that's my grandson — up here to do the chores this morning. But he said, no, he'd come. I shouldn't have let him."

"So he came," Helen said more to herself than to anyone. "And ran into the Brodies. Or they found him here when they broke in." She looked down at Mrs. Butterfield. "If your grandson had come in place of Norman, it might have been him."

Mrs. Butterfield gasped. A short sharp gasp, like the click of a rattle, and I went to refill the glass.

After Mrs. Butterfield was taken to her car to be driven home by a deputy, Helen came back into the house and said to me, "Want to see the boy's room?"

I said yes.

"Come along then. But don't touch anything. And don't wander. I don't want to have to hold your hand."

"I'm willing."

ACTUALLY, NORMAN KYLE HAD HAD TWO ROOMS: A BED-room and I guess what you'd call a study or a den or an office. Helen knew the house from working there and she pointed out the rooms.

The bedroom wasn't much, almost a cell. It looked like a converted linen closet. It contained a narrow bed, a bureau, a small mirror, a reading lamp pinned above the bed. Across one corner of the room, a metal pipe was set up as a clothes rack. A slit of window looked out on the farmyard at back. The walls were stark white, but the light from outside made them look gray. There was nothing on the walls except the lamp, the mirror above the bureau, and a cruciform above the door. A towel rack, fixed to the back of the entrance door, held a face-cloth, a hand towel, and a bath towel. The floor was bare, the boards polished but not doing much to brighten the room. The bureau's bottom drawer was open.

Helen walked over to the bureau and looked down into the drawer. There was a wide assortment of bandannas and scarves of different colors at the right of the drawer. They were neatly folded, but looked as if they had been moved and not put back just the way they had been before.

Helen said, "This must be where that black scarf came from, the gag."

We left the bedroom. Before going into the study (I'll call it that), Helen went to the head of the back stairway, the one leading down into the kitchen. The body was still at the bottom of the stairs, John Matthis over it. The medical examiner looked up as our forms blocked the light from the upper floor.

"Well, Doctor?" Helen said.

"Multiple contusions. Neck broken. Death probably immediate."

Matthis added, as if it were important, "No pain. I don't think there was any pain. Very little, anyway."

"When?"

"An hour ago, maybe two."

Helen turned to me. "Badder and badder for the Brodies. They fall right into the time period."

"Did you see the van turn off the road and come up here?"

"No. I caught a glimpse of it while I was on patrol. They panicked when they saw me. I had to show them I meant business." She touched her holstered pistol.

"But you can't say when they came?"

"They hadn't gotten very far along by the time I showed up. But, no, I can't say."

We moved down the hall toward Norman Kyle's study. "Walk easy in here," she said.

THIS WAS A DIFFERENT ROOM, A CORNER ROOM FULL OF light. Where the bedroom had been cold and uninviting, this room was warm and, well, interesting. The walls were lined with sturdy shelves, all loaded with books. Against one of the two windows, a bright green, paint-it-yourself desk had been pushed. On the desk were a number of books held up by a couple of angular rocks used as bookends. These books were probably much-used references. I read some of the titles: *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English; The Craft of Fiction; Roget's Thesaurus; The Dictionary of Human Behavior*. A Bible sat on a corner of the desk and, across the room, a stand held *Webster's Unabridged*. At the other window, a caster table supported a typewriter.

I pointed to a white-covered steno pad on the desk. I asked, "What's this?"

"His journal. He made daily entries."

"Like a diary?"

"Not like a diary. He explained it to me once. Writers keep them. They record story ideas, names they might want to give their characters, snatches of dialogue, titles for stories, sentences and paragraphs they think up, quotes. Don't you keep one, Oscar?"

"No," I said. "I'd like to look in it."

"We'll have to be careful. The cover is enamel card and might have a print on it. If it belonged to a Brodie, that would prove they were up here on this floor."

Helen lifted the cover by its edges. Inside the cover we saw printed neatly in two lines: Journal VII/Brett Donnegon.

"Who's Donnegon?"

Helen smiled. "It was his pen name, Oscar—would have been."

"Can I see today's entries?"

Helen carefully flipped the pages until she came to the last page with writing on it. There was only one entry for the date: "Possible Title — The Pattern of His Death."

"Appropriate," I murmured.

We worked back to the inside front cover. There was nothing very helpful in the contents, they were as Helen described them. She closed the pad and left it on the desk, a white rectangle awash in green.

"Let's leave," she said abruptly. "I have a bad feeling about this room."

"I think it's kind of pleasant."

"It's the pleasantness that depresses me. Here's a boy who knows where he's going. He's organized for success. He's not rattling around the county giving us a hard time. And then he has to die because he shows up here one day and stumbles into two nervous crooks. This room shouldn't be pleasant, Oscar."

I FILED MY STORY BY PHONE AFTER THE TECHNICIANS had checked the instrument and found it clean. Next, I got from Helen where she would be that afternoon in case I needed a follow-up. Then I drove slowly back to Paulsburg. During the drive I did a lot of thinking. I did more at my desk in the city room after I had verified something in a book I kept in my right-hand bottom drawer.

After everything clicked into place, I picked up the phone and asked the switchboard to get me the Sheriff's Department in Weaver's Lee, the Tuttey County seat. A voice answered at the other end and I asked for Helen. The voice called across a room and I listened to the sharp, precise click of heels as Helen came to the phone.

"Deputy Lutson," she said.

"How about dinner tonight?"

"This is Oscar, right? Look, I have nothing against you, but — "

"Let's leave it at this," I offered. "Remember that black scarf? The gag? I hope you haven't untied it. If you have, retie it and make sure the new knot is over the creases the old knot made. Where's the Kyle boy's body? The state police morgue?"

"Yes, it will be until the autopsy and we release it to Hannah and Thick. I have to meet them when they fly in this afternoon. What are you talking about, Oscar?"

"Do this. Go to the morgue and see if the gag fits over the boy's mouth. If it doesn't, meet me at Rancini's — that's the Italian restaurant up here in Paulsburg, on Sycamore — at seven tonight. After we eat, I'll tell you why it doesn't fit. Okay?"

"All right, but Oscar — "

I hung up, waited a moment or two, then put in a call to Rancini's. Reservations for two. I was that sure.

SHE WAS THERE ON THE DOT. I WAS UNHAPPY TO SEE HER still in uniform, but reasoned she had come from taking the Kyles home. She looked beat, and when she came in waved to me and went straight to the powder room. She came out about ten minutes later, reinforced and looking somewhat better. She carried her hat by its brim and handed it to the hostess who brought her to the table.

"How'd it go?" I asked.

"It was awful. Thick took the blindness badly, won't accept it, won't even use his cane, and now this." She leaned across the table and fixed me with that brown-eyed intensity. "I tell you, Oscar, if it's in my power, I'm going to throw the book at the Brodies. Maybe they won't hang, but they'll pay. They'll be arraigned Monday." Then her mind worked back to why she was there. "How did you know it wouldn't fit?"

"The bargain was after we eat," I said, handing her a menu.

"I didn't know we made a bargain."

"We did." I pointed to the menu which she held listlessly. "Read. Order. Eat. And drink, too. You like chianti?"

She half nodded, half shook her head and brought the menu up to eye level. A waitress came to the table. I ordered the wine, and veal *parmigiana*. Helen ordered shrimp *scampi*. I had the impression she picked the first thing her eyes saw.

We ate in silence. I'm a fast eater, one of those fast eaters who reflect a love of food, who eagerly participate in the joy of its consumption. Helen ate fast, too, but I think she was just putting it away so she could get to the subject in the forefront of her mind. She didn't touch her wine and I noticed she just picked at her side of linguini.

While the waitress cleared our plates, I asked, "Dessert? They have *spumoni*."

She shook her head. "Just coffee. Black."

I added tea with lemon to the order, and the waitress took off.

"Now, Oscar, let's cut out the cat-and-mouth routine. The scarf was loose. How did you know it wouldn't fit over Norman's mouth?"

"Think about it. If the Brodies wanted to gag Norman, why would they go to that bureau, rummage around making a selection? Why not use one of the kitchen towels? Or one of the towels in the bedroom? But the real question is: Why gag him at all?"

"To keep him from calling out."

"Who'd be listening? The house is in the middle of nowhere. And why gag him and not tie his hands? Remember, just putting that scarf over his mouth wouldn't be effective. They'd have to stuff something in his mouth and then put the scarf over it."

She stared at me, then shrugged her shoulders.

"The scarf had a function." I took a drink of wine and thought of what I'd be like if I had to drink the bottle unaided. "Helen, help out with the wine. Please."

She picked up her glass and in one healthy swallow, drained it. I refilled the glass and she brought it up to her mouth and touched her upper lip to the liquid. She lowered the glass. "You don't think the

Brodies saw the boy at all, do you?"

"No." I noticed the wine still clung to her upper lip, glistened there.

"They said they never saw him, but we expected them to say that. They said they had barely started before I came in on them. But we expected them to say that, too." She raised the glass again, reglistened her upper lip, lowered the glass. "I have to admit, Wendell seemed convincing, and his son was scared, really scared. But what was it all about? Did Norman just fall down the stairs?"

"Yes, possibly just before the Brodies pulled up."

"How could he just fall down those stairs, stairs he had been going up and down all his life?"

"Remember his journal? Remember 'The Pattern of His Death'?"

"What about it?"

"I knew I read it somewhere. It's from the New Testament. Philippians 3:11, a recent translation." I took a slip of paper from my pocket. "It goes like this: ' . . . to share his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death.'"

She fell silent. I had the idea she was turning the words over in her mind. I watched her as she thought, watched her upper lip, still glistening, the contour of her cheek, those eyes, half-lidded now, the precise path of white scalp where she parted her hair, the soft line of her throat, what I could see of it above the buttoned collar of the uniform shirt. After awhile, she said, "I see. It was a blindfold, wasn't it?"

"Yes. The color was symbolic. That's why Norman searched around in that bureau drawer until he found that particular scarf. Darkness."

She put her wine down and moved her hand to her face in that fluttering gesture women use when they want to give you the idea they're pushing back loose hair, but are really stealing a dab at their eyes.

"That kid." She sighed. "Reproducing the pattern of his father's 'death' — trying to experience an existence in the dark world Thick'll be in for the rest of his life. With the blindfold on, he must have missed his footing and fallen down those stairs."

"Yes."

She stood up.

"Where are you going? You haven't had your coffee yet."

"I haven't time. I have to see Sheriff Roche and report this new development." (So official!) "May I split the bill with you?"

"No."

She turned to go, walked a few steps, then came back to the table. "Oscar, you kept me from making a big mistake. I won't forget."

"Will I see you again? Maybe out of uniform?"

"Wednesday is my best night."

WEDNESDAY NIGHT WE WERE BACK IN RANCINI'S. I HAVE a one-track mind about restaurants — and food. If I like a place, it has my business forever. I had veal *parmigiana* again, Helen had chicken *cacciatore*.

In the course of moving some chicken to her mouth, Helen said, "I told the Kyles."

"What was their reaction?"

She returned the chicken to her plate, pushed it around in the sauce there. "To Hannah, it didn't make any difference. She's lost a son, the how of it doesn't matter. Thick was different. I almost felt he could see out of those sightless eyes. The way he looked at me. He had to know every detail. He was a completely different man from the one I picked up at the airport Saturday afternoon. For that matter, different from the man I saw when I walked in the front door. Had to know everything. Every detail. And he asked for his cane while I was there. Hannah had to get it from the closet. He insisted on coming to the door with me. On the way to my car, I could hear him tapping his way back to her."

She stopped, then said in a soft, sad voice, "Poor Norman. A waste."

I thought about that. And I thought about the father asking for his cane.

"You think so?" I said to Helen. "You really think so?"



MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

Isak Romun (*The Pattern of his Death*):

lives in Waverly, Va., is primarily a mystery writer. His stories have appeared in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*, and *Espionage Magazine* as well as in several anthologies. He is a member of Mystery Writers of America, Private-Eye Writers of America, and the Virginia Writers Club. Five of his stories appear on the Honor Roll of the Yearbook of the Mystery and Suspense Story. He teaches fiction writing at Christopher Newport College and John Tyler Community College in Virginia. In addition to writing fiction, he supervises a publications group at the US Army Quartermaster School, Fort Lee, Va.

It hasn't stopped, has it? Okay. Don't say you weren't warned. Repeat: do not say you weren't warned!

Exhibition

by BRIAN PINKERTON

Hello, scum.

Although we have not had the treasured opportunity to meet and become acquainted, it should be recognized in terms not uncertain that I am fully aware of who you are and what you are doing.

A critical issue has arisen between you and I, strangers though we may be, and there is a very genuine potential that it could reach tragic proportions. If you are blessed with anything vaguely resembling sound intelligence, you will understand that this is not a matter to be taken lightly. Consequences will not only match but transcend the ugliness of your erroneous ways.

I know what's going on.

And it better stop.

By now you should know who I am.

You are messing with what does not belong to you. My strict advice is for you to promptly remove your hands from now until infinity plus two.

Is this understood? Need I repeat myself? Do I not make myself perfectly clear?

Quite simply, the message is: Stop.

Or else.

CONTENTS HEREIN WILL BE LISTED AS:

POLICE EXHIBIT A, DOCUMENT 1

DO NOT REMOVE FROM PRECINCT

Phil,

This could be a false alarm, but then again possibly not. I sense trouble. I am worried about Richard because I think he knows. Recently it's in his eyes and it's in his behavior. He hasn't said anything outright yet, but he's been acting very different. He's been in very quiet, brooding moods, which is not good and usually a prelude to an outburst. But I can't tell anything for absolute sure. I have to wait. That's why I can't meet you tonight. I could get Bette to cover me but I want to wait. I'm sorry the handwriting is sloppy, but I'm writing this quickly and nervously.

Phone isn't safe, so don't call. This is safer. Keep your car parked on the street, locked with the window slightly open and I'll drop in a new note tomorrow on the way to the grocery.

God, honey, I want to see you again — bad! You never leave my thoughts during the day and you are all I dream about at night. It hurts but we have to postpone our next get together. I swear to God there is no telling what might happen if Richard ever caught me being unfaithful.

I love and miss you honey,
Greta

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**POLICE EXHIBIT B, DOCUMENT 1
DO NOT REMOVE FROM PRECINCT**

Journal Entry for Tues. April 10, 1984:

Greta was supposed to meet me at the Inn tonight and canceled because she suspects her Neanderthal husband is catching on. She's correct but doesn't know it. Her husband — Richard is his name? — stuffed a threatening, unsigned letter in the mailbox sometime during the day. I'm currently more confused than ever.

I need to be with her and can't concentrate on anything else. I have a stack of grammar quizzes waiting to be graded and still haven't touched them. The students will bitch. Tomorrow I pass out the new essay assignment. The students will bitch some more.

The apartment is a mess. Without Greta, my motivation to do anything is gone. I keep the stereo playing constantly. The music erases the silence and hides the emptiness that swells inside the apartment, inside me.

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**POLICE EXHIBIT C
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English 211

P. Flynn

April 11, 1984

Expository Essay #2

In a typewritten 2-4 page essay discuss a major time period or event in your life which you feel to be a significant turning point or learning experience. Describe how it may have changed you and created a new set of values.

Due April 18. No extensions this time.

Check your spelling (if in doubt, consult the dictionary) and *Be Neat!* (no more than 3-4 typos per page please). Good luck!

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POLICE EXHIBIT D, DOCUMENT 1
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You went and violated her again, didn't you?

A shame. A real shame. I had more faith in you than that. I *believed* in you, pal. Makes me feel pretty doggone stupid, to tell you the truth. I thought it was over. For several days things were going so nicely. I figured you understood the critical situation you had submerged yourself into and that you were wisely scrambling from the hole you had dug for yourself before it became too deep.

But nope. It just ain't so.

Last night: the Motel 6, an armpit of a place just off the highway. Did you enjoy yourself? Did you enjoy committing adultery with my wife?

Dare to keep it up and you will be one damned sorry bastard. Dare to keep it up and you will find yourself facing the absolute most sorry day of your life.

Which could be death.

The choice is yours.

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POLICE EXHIBIT A, DOCUMENT 2
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Phil,

Concerning last night:

If ever moments can be considered perfect, I think that we've encountered them. I am *still* glowing. I'm walking around today with a silliness in my head. I feel like I'm back in high school with a bigger-than-life crush on the basketball team captain. Except better.

Concerning Richard's suspicion, everything this time around worked like a charm. I'm almost certain he never suspected a thing. Bette and Ann covered for me. He was asleep when I got back. He looks so harmless, like a boy when he's asleep. I could never love him again, but when I see him sleeping, eyes shut and face relaxed in the shadows, he almost looks innocent and just barely resembles the man I once thought I loved and married two long years ago.

I'm looking forward to our next encounter. This time: I bring the champagne and the music cassettes and the other surprises. It's my

turn, okay? And I'll pick the place, which will be a surprise. I'm excited just thinking about it!

I will call you from a pay phone tomorrow after you get done teaching, probably between three-thirty and five.

Love you.

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POLICE EXHIBIT B, DOCUMENT 2
DO NOT REMOVE FROM PRECINCT**

Journal Entry for Tues. April 17, 1984:

More threats from Greta's husband and another extraordinary evening with Greta herself. I am quite torn concerning what to do now. How somebody as marvelous as her ever got involved with a vile, depraved sociopath like him is beyond me. How real are his threats? I know only one thing: I cannot stop seeing Greta.

Intense nervousness has settled over me. I find myself constantly grinding my teeth. I can't sleep, my stomach hurts and my crap comes out looking like corn flakes. I've been acting foolish in front of the students. I dropped the chalk five times today; perhaps this is a record. Got inexplicably hostile at one of the students — really let him have it for some minor thing. Too often I feel an angry fire break out inside my chest. I'm so far behind on paperwork now it isn't funny.

It's her damn husband. He's the problem.

Raining now outside, thundering. I'm laughing because it's so appropriate to my mood now — a nice melodramatic soundtrack to my current life.

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POLICE EXHIBIT C
DO NOT REMOVE FROM PRECINCT**

Phil,

Richard has been unbearable lately (really nothing new) and I've been all shaky and upset and felt I had to write you, because you are the one and only solid, special thing in my life. I need you to lean on, baby. Just writing to you now is making me feel better.

Richard's been bitching about the condition of the house, the meals, etcetera. He's been shouting, slapping. I think work at the plant must have him upset and he's taking it out on me. Certainly nothing new.

I swear, often I pray to God that one day he'll drop dead of a heart attack or meet up with an accident — a car crash or a mishap at work

— and I will be rid of fearing him forever. Sometimes I wish I had a button I could press that would make him disappear forever. I would not miss him. You can't possibly ever know the terror I go through when he has one of his outbursts. You've seen the bruises and the cuts: that isn't even the worst of it. The worst part is the emotional scars. The knowledge that the man doing this to me is my husband, the man who is supposed to love me. He's the man whom I am supposed to love and I no longer do. I used to worry that it was me, that I was the one incapable of real love.

Thank you for showing me hope, Phil. You've turned my life around. You've reinforced a belief I once held long ago that people can be indeed beautiful. You are one of the few beautiful people and the most important person ever to appear in my life.

—kiss!kiss!—

Greta

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POLICE EXHIBIT B, DOCUMENT 3
DO NOT REMOVE FROM PRECINCT

Steven Schellenberg
April 18, 1984
English 211
Mr. Flynn

Essay #2
A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

I do not have a proud past but from it I am learning. That is why I'm a freshman in high school when the other people my age are now seniors and graduating. I have not advanced those years because I spent three years of my life in a Texas juvenile delinkuent center for being involved in the accidental death of a 16 year old boy. When I lived in Texas before I moved here I was involved in getting revenge against Rudy Mitchell from my old school, who terrorised our nieghborhood and me and my brothers especielly. He stole my 5-speed bicycle from our garage and also dumped paint on our driveway and lawn and broke a window. His parents never believed my parents when we said what he had done, that he was a bully and a thief.

One day he beat my brother who is three years younger than him with a wiffle ball baseball bat (plastic but it hurts) and my brother was bruised from head to toe. His parents denied it could have been him and dared us to call the police department and we did. The police

visited his house but not much happened and after that Rudy said we were in deep trouble.

His parents spoiled him all the time and for his birthday he got a car from them, a Dodge Charger. He was even more of a menice then and got drunk and drove on lawns, had accidents and even once tried to run my littlest brother over for no reason when he was walking home from school one day. When this happened, my brother was crying and I got furious and that night is when we rigged Rudy's car. I am very smart about mechanics and I know all about engines. Since I knew all about how to do it, I was the one who got the tools and equipment and fixed it to explode when started but I WAS NOT the only person involved. Everyone in the nieghborhood hated Rudy and everyone urged me on and contributed. There were others with me, even helping, even though in court when they told on me they denied helping.

It was terrible when I heard the explosion the next morning. I was scared to death and so were my brothers. We all woke up and started crying because we realized what we had done. I was so scared I got sick in the toilet. There were sirens and police all day. We found out that Rudy died right away when the car ignition set off the bomb.

I never really meant to harm another person. I was blinded by a mad fury. I never realized the seriousness of what I did until it happened. This was my hardest experience which I can never forget. It is one of the hardest a kid like me can ever have. I have learned that you should never try to take the law into your own hands and punish someone yourself because that is for the authorities like the police. I have learned that experimenting with explosives is deadly serious and not a game for kids. I have learned that everyone's life is valuable no matter who they may be that two wrongs do not make a right. It was my hardest lesson.

IMPORTANT — Mr. Flynn, I am new here and my new friends and classmates don't know about my past in Texas. It is my very worst side. Please keep this all confidential and don't show or read to class.

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POLICE EXHIBIT D, DOCUMENT 2
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Welcome to Story Time.

Once upon a time there was a man who screwed up. This man did something very wrong and knew it was very wrong, yet he unwisely continued — he *did not cease* his actions. He did it once, twice, three times and then a fourth time. All along the way there was a second man who graciously went out of his way to warn him of the potential conse-

quences of his wrong behavior. These consequences were harsh and extreme. But the first man was not a very perceptive human being and ignored the advice given to him by the second man. He ignored the advice once, twice, three times, and then it was too late.

The first man did not live happily ever after.

Pal, you're about to unleash hell. You're mere inches away from it. So close that I can feel the flames heating me up, boiling the blood inside my veins. You're about to become one *very* regretful young man.

This is my absolute final warning.

Stay away from Greta.

**CONTENTS HEREIN WILL BE LISTED AS:
POLICE EXHIBIT A, DOCUMENT 3
DO NOT REMOVE FROM PRECINCT**

Journal Entry for Tue. April 24, 1984:

After receiving Richard's latest lunatic hate-screwing, I told myself that for my own safety and the safety of Greta I would stop seeing her. The affair had reached a point where it was too dangerous to continue and I was all set to call it quits. I started to write out a long, careful speech to recite to Greta — I worked on it all Sunday night, drinking coffee and swallowing Vivarin — but never finished it, because I couldn't.

Yesterday, after class let out, I retreated to the teachers' parking lot, arms clutching volumes of overdue desk work, to find Greta waiting by my car. She was smiling broadly, her hair was done up special and she was dressed up. She had a sack of Chinese food and a bottle of wine. "My surprise night," she informed me, then explained that we had a hotel suite waiting for us downtown.

That is where we spent the next three hours. On a few occasions early on I almost came close to delivering my speech, but it insisted on halting and getting stuck in my throat. I simply couldn't do it. Ending this affair is impossible, it cannot be done. I am too weak.

And then to top it off late last night I read a particularly unnerving essay from a student in my 10:30 class. Later, when I went to sleep, it prompted the most curiously beautiful dream. In it, Richard disappeared in a bright orange flash while sitting behind the wheel of his car . . .

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POLICE EXHIBIT C
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It hasn't stopped, has it, pal?

Okay.

Don't say you weren't warned.

Repeat: Do not say that you weren't warned.

That's all I really have to say for now. It's been superswell talking to you, but in all sincerity I've got to run. You see, I've got an errand I want to take care of before the shops close. They've got the *nicest* .38 handgun on sale downtown, and it's one of those bargains I simply can't allow myself to pass up. You understand, don't you?

Have a great afterlife . . .

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POLICE EXHIBIT A, DOCUMENT 4

DO NOT REMOVE FROM PRECINCT

FROM THE DESK OF PHIL FLYNN

Steven:

I was very impressed with your essay! Both your spelling and grammar skills have improved considerably. You would be proud to know you received the only A-plus out of the 33 students in my two English classes. Your honesty regarding what were unfortunate circumstances was touching and expertly transcribed.

With your collective grade pulled up by this wonderful essay, it is entirely possible that you could reach a B mark for the semester.

Please meet with me after class for instructions concerning a special out-of-class extra-credit assignment.

P. Flynn

CONTENTS HEREIN WILL BE LISTED AS:

POLICE EXHIBIT D, DOCUMENT 3

DO NOT REMOVE FROM PRECINCT

THE OUTDOORSMAN
GUNS * AMMO * SUPPLIES
PLEASE RETAIN THIS RECEIPT
FOR ALL RETURNS
4/26/84

LISTED AS:

POLICE EXHIBIT E

DO NOT REMOVE FROM PRECINCT

Phil,

RICHARD KNOWS! He's known about us since the beginning — *everything*. Tonight when he came home from work he had an outburst and it all came out. All day he's been throwing me around the house, shouting and waving a GUN. It took every ounce of effort in me to prevent him from coming after you. I swore to him that we would not see each other again. He let me deliver this one last message to you to tell you it's most definitely over, over, *over* between us. Do NOT try to contact me. Do not call or come near here. The affair has got to end *NOW*.

Greta

**CONTENTS HEREIN WILL BE LISTED AS:
POLICE EXHIBIT B, DOCUMENT 4
DO NOT REMOVE FROM PRECINCT**

Journal Entry for Thur. April 26, 1984:

It's 3 a.m. and right now, seven blocks from where I sit at my kitchen table, Steven is working on his special assignment. He assured me it would be finished in a quick twenty minutes if all goes well. Richard leaves for work at the plant routinely at 6 a.m. in his beat-up brown Chevy. On this particular morning, he will not arrive.

At first Steven was extremely reluctant to rig the engine. Luckily, he is also not the least bit intelligent. He started out not wanting any part of the scheme, but I talked my ass off to him and after an hour he could hardly wait to begin. I'm his favorite teacher, one of the major grown-ups in his life; my word is Truth: I'm up there with Mom, Dad and God. He trusts me.

Besides, as I carefully explained to him, if for some reason he chose not to comply, I would be forced to read his heartwarming essay aloud for the class and that would most likely ruin any hopes he might have had for making new acquaintances here. It would be ugly, as would be his semester grade.

In a few short hours Greta will awaken to a loud explosion outside her bedroom window that will mark the beginning of a new era in her life and mine. I was told I'd be shot, I still have Richard's threats — if by some unlikely chance I am caught, this is lawful self-defense. But I am not going to be caught. I am far from the scene of the crime.

Alone here at my bare kitchen table, I am trembling. The sky outside is pitch black; everything is soundless. My words in this journal are shaky and barely legible. Sleep is out of the question. I'm far too excited for sleep . . .

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POLICE EXHIBIT C
DO NOT REMOVE FROM PRECINCT

Phil honey,

I love you. I hope you have never doubted that for a minute. I know for certain that I have never once had doubts about you.

Earlier today Richard hit me, split open my lip and made me write the note that said our relationship had to end. He made me deliver that note, but will not see me subsequently mail this one, which you should receive in a day or two. I want you to know that the relationship between us is *not* going to end. It is going to become stronger than ever because I am leaving Richard for good. I have two suitcases hidden and packed with the most important of what I own. At 4 a.m. tonight, when he is in a deep, snoring sleep, I am slipping out of the house and taking his Chevy to the train station. I'm leaving the car there and taking the first available train somewhere far and secret — so secret that not even I know for sure where I will end up. But I will let you know when I do. I'm going to start a brand new life, Phil, and I want you in it.

All my life I have associated with people who have exhibited the dark, ugly side of human nature. Again and again it seems I have entered the types of behavior that can severely embitter your outlook on life. Until I met you I was mostly exposed to the worst qualities people can have. You changed everything: you gave me faith. You display the wonderful qualities that people are capable of. I used to never believe they existed — strength, kindness, sincerity, intelligence, warmth. What you exhibit is rare, honey. Don't ever lose it.

When you receive this letter in your mailbox, I will be gone. My life has been anxious for drastic change and *finally* I am becoming a brave enough soul to do something about it. I am elated — so elated at the moment I could burst. The bad times that once dominated are at last coming to an end.

Wait for my call, baby. It won't be long — and that's a promise.

Hey — you're special.

Love you.

Greta

CONTENTS . . .



Death lurked all around him, waiting for the moment he made a mistake that could not be corrected!

Hector Gomez Provides

by JOHN LUTZ

HERE, A HUNDRED AND FIFTY FEET HIGH ON THE ANCIENT stone Tower of Saint Marcos, Hector Gomez felt free. The wind whipped about his lithe body, threatening to snatch him and hurl him out into high, cool space above the sea. A pelican flew past, lower than Hector, and gazed obliquely at him between wingbeats then soared in an ascending arc toward the sun. Below Hector the waves rolled in and became graceful ribbons of white surf, then boiling white water,

against the rocks.

To Hector's right was the Avenue Del Mar, where three *turista* buses were parked in a line at the side of the road. Along the top of the stone wall above the sea, Mexican vendors had their glittering handmade wares displayed on blankets for sale to the Americans.

Directly below Hector was a tiny, semi-isolated portion of the sea. Saint Marcos Cove. The swells roared into the miniature cove regularly and smashed in white foam over jagged rock along the shore. The sides of the cove, less than a hundred feet apart, were also lined with sharp rock. Only in its center, for brief moments, was the water relatively calm.

Three times a day, Hector Gomez dived from atop the Tower of Saint Marcos into the center of the tiny cove. He had to time each dive perfectly with an oncoming swell, hitting the water just as the wave rolled into the cove. Otherwise the water in the cove was only about four feet deep, and the bottom was lined with hard pebbles rolled smooth by the waves. It was indeed a matter of delicate timing, Hector's dive. And a matter of courage. Everyone, tourist and native alike, knew that the dive was extremely dangerous.

And Hector knew the danger. With the detachment and freedom he felt before each dive came the accompanying price of fear.

Below him the *turistas* were all out of the buses, staring up at him, pointing, focusing their cameras. Sunlight glinted off Mexican silver spread along the sea wall, off the windows of the buses and off upturned camera lenses.

Hector's feeling of freedom passed. It was time for business; he had Maria and their two children to feed and shelter. And the bus driver-guides below had by now finished telling the *turistas* the manufactured legend of Spanish gold hidden somewhere at the bottom of the cove. Perhaps someday the brave diver would emerge with a handful of doubloons and no longer have to risk his life; the prospect, said the guides, was what compelled him to face death daily, even though the gold was cursed.

Hector let the first two swells roll into the cove and break; they were too small and the water in the cove wouldn't be deep enough for the dive.

The third wave appeared large enough. Fear tried to crawl up Hector's throat again as he raised his right arm in a signal to the *turista* that he was about to dive, that they should ready their cameras. Now there was no turning back and still living a man's life with self-respect.

When the glittering emerald swell was at just the right point, almost ready to roll into the cove, Hector swallowed his near-panic, flexed his

knees, and hurled himself off the tower.

The freedom again. The fear. He had to leap far enough out to clear the outcropping of cliff below. Had to keep his back tightly arched before going into the vertical position, or he might flip over too far backward and land wrong, on his back, breaking himself on the water even before he struck the cove's bottom. Yet if he didn't straighten his body in time, there was the cliff.

He timed it, *uno, dos, tres . . .* and he aimed his outstretched arms forward and down and brought his feet up, legs strained straight and rigid. He willed his body out away from the cliff, clenching his teeth so hard that a sharp pain shot through his jaws.

The tops of his tucked-in toes brushed the outcropping of rock seventy feet above the water, and he knew it would be a good dive.

Barely had he realized this when his fists broke the rushing surface of the wave rolling into the cove. There was a crash of water that he heard only for an instant. He arched his back again, flattening out quickly beneath the surface to slow his descent. Still he struck bottom hard, scraping his chest and thighs even though he pushed away from the smooth pebbles with his palms. His breath rushed out from between his lips in a graceful swirl of pearl-like bubbles, his blood pulsed in his ears, and he forced himself to stay calm as he rose to the surface.

The *turistas* were applauding. Even in the sun's heat, Hector felt the warm glow of their appreciation; they had been entertained. The Americans didn't know that this part of his act, reaching shore without being smashed against the rocks, was almost as dangerous as the dive.

Hector stroked cautiously toward where the surf broke over the rocks; watching warily behind him for the next wave to come crashing in through the mouth of the cove. When it came, he prudently ducked beneath it and let it roll over him, feeling its force pass him by, rather than let it carry him tumbling out of control toward the jagged rocks. As the wave receded and the water again became momentarily calm, he raised his head and stroked again for shore.

He had to deal with three waves this way before he finally was safe on the rocks. Smiling, he climbed up to the road and walked wet and triumphant among the *turistas*, gratefully accepting their compliments, pesos, and the admiring glances of the young women. The *turistas* voiced appreciation of his great courage. He smiled and told them he hoped they had gotten good photographs to take home from their Mexican vacations.

When the *turistas* had left, Vicente Escobar, one of the silver vendors, walked over to Hector and stood with him watching the exhaust-darkened square backs of the departing buses. A few of the *turistas*

waved from open windows, then quickly closed the glass to conserve air conditioning.

"You're going to kill yourself," Vicente Escobar said. "Why do you continue to dive?" Even as he asked, he knew it was a question for which there was a universal answer.

"I do it for this," Hector said, holding up the fistful of pesos he had collected for his dive. He had in his hand over eleven hundred pesos. Almost seven American dollars.

At the end of the day, Hector changed from his low-cut black trunks into worn jeans and a sleeveless red tee-shirt. Then, with his day's profits locked in a steel box in the car's trunk, he climbed into his ten-year-old gray Plymouth and drove south twenty miles to the village of Barbilla, where he lived with Maria, their five-year-old son Eugenio, and their six-year-old daughter Ramona.

The Gomezes' lifestyle was much like everyone else's in Barbilla. Their home was small, simple, with a dirt floor, and a sheet metal roof held down by nails driven through bottle caps whose cork linings kept out the seasonal rains. In the Gomez home was running water, and a bathroom. Because Hector dived rather than eke out a living as a fisherman, the Gomezes were only occasionally hungry.

MARIA GOMEZ WATCHED HER HUSBAND WALK UP THE path to their home. To her right, where the land overlooked the ocean, she knew that the American Martin still stood before his canvas and easel, painting another of his seascapes. She had gone up the trail to the rocks and talked to the American again today. Why not? She was lonely, with Hector always gone. To be alone with two small children was enough to drive any twenty-five-year-old woman *loco*, especially a woman as energetic and pretty as Maria. Probably, she thought, lowering her hands to wipe grease from tortillas onto her print skirt, Hector wouldn't object to her talking with the American Martin. But it would be just as well if Hector never found out. He had a man's foolish pride.

Eugenio saw Hector and ran out to embrace his father. Young Ramona followed. Hector hugged his children to him, smiling whitely, his lean muscles dancing and cording as he lifted a child in each arm.

"It was a profitable day," he said, as he lowered the children and bent to kiss Maria. "Almost four thousand pesos." He was beaming proudly, this man who risked death to provide for his family, so she smiled at him. "Soon we might have enough saved to move away from here, into Mazatlan."

Into a house almost like this only larger, Maria thought, though she said, "Supper is almost ready."

He walked past her. She could feel the weariness emanating from his body. Herself weary, she followed him into the house and tended to the rice and shrimp on the propane gas stove. If Hector moved them to Mazatlan Maria might have an electric stove; she'd heard they were better. But she wanted more than that, really. She wanted her meals cooked for her like the rich in the cities. She wanted not just better clothes, but fine clothes. For herself. For her children. For the foolishly daring Hector.

What she did not want was for Hector to time one of his dives wrong and die. Or worse, become a cripple she would have to support for the rest of their marriage. Maria, living in poverty, remembered abject poverty, and was afraid of it. When she passed a beggar in the square, pleading respectfully with the *turistas* for money for herself and the children, Maria felt something cold crawl about inside her. She could be that woman, she knew. The difference between what she was and what she might become was only a fraction of a second, an insane risk taken three times a day every day twenty miles down the coast at the Tower of Saint Marcos.

Hector ate greedily, gratefully, complimenting Maria on her cooking. After supper he played with the children, laughing and making promises he couldn't keep. Though he was a man, and a good one, there was something childlike in Hector's dark, lithe handsomeness. His was a youthful, whipcord body that moved with a matador's grace and strength. Yet now he was thirty-four, and above his black diving trunks was the beginning of a stomach paunch. Maria knew that Hector was at the time of life when men's reflexes and timing were beginning to deteriorate without them even suspecting it. This was a time of danger, especially in Hector's line of work.

In bed, he placed his lean, strong arms about her, and immediately fell asleep.

THE NEXT MORNING, THE AMERICAN MARTIN WAS AGAIN at his easel on the rocks overlooking the sea and a view of the coast, and was working on the painting he'd begun yesterday. Before speaking to him, Maria stood silently at the bend in the steep path, watching him work. His huge hands were gentle and sure with the brush, lending the canvas life. He was a tall, muscular man with pale blue eyes and a full red beard. Always beside his easel was a gray foam cooler containing ice and beer. Maria had heard that he painted dozens of pictures, then drove them into the Arts and Crafts Center in Mazatlan and sold them to *turistas*. She didn't know where Martin lived; no one seemed to know that.

He must have heard her, or sensed her presence on the path. "Good morning, Maria," he said, not looking away from his canvas. He was dabbing clouds in a blue sky.

She said nothing but moved nearer.

"What do you think?" he asked, nodding his shaggy head toward the canvas.

It amazed her that anyone could create a likeness so accurately. "*Bonito*," she said. Pretty. Not beautiful. Not majestic. Only *Bonito*.

The American Martin smiled bitterly. "Here," he said, moving away from before the easel. He gripped her elbow and positioned her to stand where he had stood, placed a brush in her hand and moved behind her. His thick arms, pale and dusted with reddish hair, slipped around her waist.

For the next two weeks, Maria went almost every day to the rocks above the ocean. The American Martin's gentle, thick hands did things to her that she had never dreamed possible, that Hector could never imagine. In Martin's loving clasp she poured out all of her fears, and he gladly accepted them and kept them safely where they no longer haunted her and foretold a bleak future.

During the third week, while Hector was at the Tower of Saint Marcos, Martin said, "Drive into Mazatlan with me. We can bring your children. There's a man I want you to meet. His name is Anderson."

"Hector will be home soon."

"It doesn't matter," Martin told her. "We'll be back within a few hours; Hector won't know you've been gone, unless the kids mention it."

"They won't if I tell them not to," Maria said. "And Hector will be tired and go to sleep soon after he eats supper."

"Then come with me," Martin coaxed. He kissed her. When his lips had barely left hers, he said, "Anderson can make us rich, you and me."

Maria knew that, like Hector, she was poised above a steep, exhilarating plunge. It would take courage to leap free.

She nodded silently, walked down the path and got the children, and they drove with Martin in his dusty Jeep into Mazatlan.

THAT SATURDAY, HIGH ABOVE HALF A DOZEN TOUR BUSES and scores of American *turistas*, Hector stood poised on the Tower of Saint Marcos and felt the freedom, but not the fear.

That puzzled him. He studied the incoming swells, waiting for the right one to time for his dive. The ribbons of white surf along the coast

beyond the cove seemed to undulate and move in unfamiliar rhythms and patterns. The sea was behaving strangely today. Perhaps that was why he wasn't afraid; the strangeness had something to do with his own new fearlessness.

At last Hector saw an oncoming swell that would provide deep enough water when it entered the cove. He watched it approach, a rolling, glittering vast hill of water, shot with sunlight as if it contained thousands of diamonds.

It seemed to take forever to reach the point Hector had chosen, where he knew it would begin to curl into a green, sloping wall for its assault on the cove. The point from where it would enter the cove only a moment before the plummeting Hector sliced into its cool depths.

In that last few seconds, Hector realized there was something wrong. The oncoming swell wasn't approaching smoothly; it was pausing, then rushing forward, wavering like liquid rippling in a drunkard's unsteady glass. Hector didn't want to dive.

But his right arm was already raised, signaling to the *turistas*, all watching from below through admiring, apprehensive eyes. Many were peering through camera lenses, hastily setting F-stops and shutter speeds, not admitting to the secret desire to record on film a brave man's death. It was too late for Hector to turn away with self-respect.

As soon as he launched himself into the air, Hector felt his confidence return. Only when he had safely passed the outcropping of rock and his body was out of its arch and vertical, did he glimpse for an instant below him the backwash of blue-green water.

The wave was receding!

Terror clutched at his throat and contorted his body. There was no time to scream. He struck the water with a dark thunder that he knew was death.

"THAT'S THAT," MARTIN SAID TO ANDERSON, THE NEXT day in Anderson's cluttered office in Mexico City. Anderson was a gangly giraffe of a man who breathed through his mouth and perspired a lot. "Maria slipped him some *peyote*. It's a drug that distorts time sense just enough. Will there be any trouble collecting from the company?"

Anderson shook his long, pale head and said, "No problem at all; no clouds on the horizon. Why should there be? A wife uses her husband's earnings to buy life insurance on him. And why not? He was in a dangerous occupation and she had two children to think about. Remember, I'm Great Intercontinental Insurance's Mexico claims agent; I can verify Hector's signature on the policy. I'll recommend to the

company that they pay his widow the settlement. There's no way for Great Intercontinental, or anyone else, to know you and I are soon going to split that settlement fifty-fifty. And what they don't know can't hurt us. By the way, where's the wealthy widow?"

"She and the kids are getting into Mexico City tomorrow," Martin said. "After the funeral. I've already rented them a nice furnished apartment on the Reforma, where we'll live happily if not ever after."

"Can you get her to sign a policy with you as the beneficiary?" Anderson asked. "A genuine signature is always best. You can't beat the real McCoy."

"I'll tell her it's a form she needs to sign to collect the settlement. She'll believe it. She can barely read and write." Martin paced to the dirty window, gazed out at the traffic on Avenue Morelos, then bit the end off a cigar. He plucked the tobacco crumbs and leaf from his tongue and rolled them between his thumb and forefinger into a tight little ball, which he tossed on the floor. Anderson's litany of smug little platitudes irritated him. Yet he didn't want to do even one more canvas and sell it to oafs for an insultingly small sum. "I'm not so confident about this one, Anderson. Are you sure the company won't suspect?"

Anderson tilted back his narrow, balding head and laughed through his nose. "Do you know how many Maria Gomezes there are in Mexico? They're like Smiths and Joneses in the United States. Like pebbles on the beach. The company will pay; they'll never even know that this Mexico City Gomez was related to Hector Gomez of Barbilla. And your name as beneficiary won't ring any bells at the home office. Believe me, Martin, we're touching all the bases. We'll soon be home free."

"Okay," Martin said, lighting the cigar. He blew smoke off to the side. "Get the policy written up and I'll get Maria to sign tomorrow night, while she's still disoriented from the funeral and the trip here. There's no point in wasting time."

"You're a man after my own heart," Anderson said, smiling and sliding open a desk drawer. "Time is money."

"For both of us," Martin said.

Or one of us, Anderson thought behind his smile. He was a man who planned ahead even as he tied loose ends.

So the Spanish gold in Saint Marcos Cove was not entirely a legend concocted for *turistas*. After his last and deepest dive, Hector Gomez did indeed produce a treasure. Complete with a curse. ●

Marcie was annoyed — and frightened — by the phone calls. “You’re going to kill yourself,” the man said. That was ridiculous. Wasn’t it?

Murder Me

by CHARMAINE PARSONS

DEXTER WAS IN TROUBLE. HIS FACE WAS BECOMING flushed and he dabbed at the perspiration on his upper lip. His voice didn’t betray his fear but he was talking more rapidly to keep his caller’s attention. He signalled Cory to have a trace started. Marcie blinked. That was a breach of confidence and done only in a critical situation.

“Yes, I can hear you cock the gun,” Dexter was saying. “But what good will that do? You’ll be dead and in two weeks she’ll have forgotten all about you. You want that?”

Marcie sucked in her breath. Dexter was playing it close.

The phone rang. Marcie wet her lips and tore her eyes from Dexter to

the flashing button.

"Crisis center. Marcie speaking."

There was a pause, but that was standard. She heard someone breathing and a sound that could have been a sob.

"Marcie?" the voice asked shakily.

"Yes. Do you want to talk?"

"So I was right. Your name is Marcie."

She was accustomed to callers who seemed confused and disoriented. "Yes, I'm Marcie. Do you want to tell me your first name or would you rather just talk? I'm here to listen and help."

There was an intake of breath. "You're going to kill yourself, Marcie."

And the line went dead.

Marcie hung up, puzzled but not alarmed.

Dexter's voice intruded on her thoughts. There was no pretext of professional calm now. He was literally pleading for the man's life.

"Don't hang up," Dexter begged. "If you talk to me about it, we'll work something out. What? Yes, I can hear the click. But you don't need that gun."

A pause while Dexter listened. The atmosphere in the room was so charged, Marcie could feel the hair bristling on the back of her arms. She found herself matching her breathing to Dexter's short pants and realized they were all doing it. Her hands gripped the desk as if they possessed a life of their own. The room was suddenly too hot and Dexter's face became a grotesque parody of his normally handsome features.

"No!" he screamed. "Don't — "

He flinched as if he had been struck a physical blow. His lips moved wordlessly as he fumbled the receiver back onto the phone.

"We got a trace!" Cory shouted from his phone. "The police are on their way!"

Dexter wet his lips and slowly began to reassemble himself. He ran a hand through hair that was already wet with perspiration and his fingers passing through his hair left it standing in little clumps.

"I don't think it matters. He pulled the trigger."

Cory swallowed and the excitement on his face drained. "That doesn't mean he used it on himself."

"No, it doesn't," Dexter agreed, but his voice lacked conviction.

"The police will call us back," Cory said, refusing to release his thin thread of hope.

Silence permeated the room until Marcie felt she would scream under its pressure. The men didn't seem to notice.

"Anyone want coffee?" she asked a little too loudly.

Dexter blinked as if awakening from a long sleep. "Ya, I could use a cup," he said and the room slowly began to return to normal.

"You did all you could," Marcie finally said. "Remember what they told us in training — some people are bent on suicide and only want an audience. There isn't too much you can do about them."

The phone rang. Dexter snatched it up first and Cory and Marcie could tell by the look on his face what the news would be.

"They didn't get there in time," Dexter said softly. "He did kill himself while I was listening."

"I'm sorry," Marcie said.

Cory glanced at the clock. He was senior member of the group and technically in charge although theirs was a loosely knit structure. "It's about twenty minutes until the midnight relief comes on. You want to go home?"

"No — no, I'll stay," Dexter smiled weakly. "It's just rough, you know?"

When their shift was over, Marcie invited Dexter and Cory out for a drink but both declined.

MARCIE REALIZED HER OWN WEARINESS WHEN SHE climbed into her battered VW. She could have afforded any car on the road but had become attached to the solid reassuring familiarity of her bug. And she had the money to make the repairs to keep it running.

Her house was a different matter. Her car looked out of place parked in the massive garage. Her dad had willed her the rambling mansion after dying less than a year after her mother's tragic accident. The doctors had labeled his death a chronic coronary condition but she always believed he had died of a broken heart. She loved the old house and couldn't bear to part with it — especially her prized flower gardens. The house and grounds were surrogate for the husband she hadn't found and the children she had yet to produce.

She tried to unlock the door quietly, but her housekeeper and mother substitute appeared in the kitchen as she was pouring herself a glass of milk.

"Want me to make you something to eat?" Abigail asked.

Marcie jumped even though she had been expecting the older woman. "No. I didn't mean to wake you."

She grabbed a handful of cookies. Abigail looked at her snack in disapproval but merely seated herself across the table.

"I wasn't asleep. There was this old movie on the t.v. I was crying over."

Marcie nodded, knowing full well Abigail had been waiting up as she did most every night.

"Is Jesse asleep?"

"Like a light. The house could blow up and he would continue to snore in the rubble."

Marcie smiled, knowing despite her complaints, Abigail was devoted to her husband. Jesse was Marcie's handyman as well as grounds keeper — except for the garden. That Marcie enjoyed doing herself. Actually, Abigail and Jesse were more like parents than servants.

Abigail studied Marcie critically. "You look awful tired."

"We lost one tonight."

Abigail made a clucking noise. "I don't know why you insist on working. You don't need the money."

"I don't get paid and I do it because I like it." It was an old argument and one she didn't care to pursue. She dusted the cookie crumbs from her hands. "I'll see you in the morning." She leaned over and planted a kiss on Abigail's cheek. "Go finish watching your movie."

Abigail merely grunted.

THE NEXT MORNING MARCIE ROSE AROUND NINE. IT WAS still gloomy, but by the time she had dressed and eaten, most of the fog had lifted and the sun was valiantly attempting to peek through the remaining patches. She filled her lungs with the morning air and mentally sorted through the list of things she hoped to accomplish that day. Jesse was on the riding mower and she waved to him. He either didn't see or didn't feel it necessary to acknowledge her greeting. Unlike Abigail, who hid behind feigned grumpiness, Jesse was truly moody.

Marcie shrugged and went to check on the seedlings. She had four small bedding frames that were her pride and joy since she had built them herself. She had dug a pit into the earth and then built a framework above it so each was about a foot deep from earth to top. The top was wooden panes each about two and one half inches square and glass covered. She had designed it that way to eliminate the higher incident of breakage she had been experiencing with the larger, unsupported panes of glass. Each was constructed with a hinged top, which she kept padlocked against prowlers. The arrangement was superior to anything on the market and she had seriously considered patenting the design.

She had a vegetable garden as well as her large flower garden. She tended the vegetable garden carefully for Abigail loved to can, but her true joy was her flowers — especially the roses that had won her several prizes.

Right now she was battling a particularly tough aphid that threat-

ened to destroy any chance she might have in the show this year.

The day passed quickly. She studied her hands critically as she bathed that evening. Her nails were a cracked disgrace and there was dirt embedded in her work-roughened hands that wouldn't wash out no matter how hard she scrubbed. But she hated to wear gloves. She wanted to feel the earth when she worked, know the texture of her plants.

She finished soaping. It was a small price to pay for something that gave her so much enjoyment. And she wasn't a great beauty who needed soft, feminine hands.

ABIGAIL WAS UNUSUALLY QUIET AT DINNER AND JESSE later confided in Marcie that the older woman hadn't really been feeling well.

"Why don't you two take off for a week or so — leave tomorrow," Marcie said.

"I've tried to talk her into it, but she says you need us."

Marcie smiled. "Sure, I need you. But I can also manage for a week or so without you. Just plan on leaving tomorrow for a week and tell Abigail I said she was to go."

Jesse's weathered face crinkled into a smile. "Thanks a lot, Marcie. I knew you'd understand."

His happiness gave Marcie a warm glow that lasted the afternoon. She was in a cheerful mood when she greeted Dexter and Cory at the crisis center. She noticed Dexter looked tired.

She put her arm around him and planted an impulsive kiss on his cheek. "Can I help?"

Dexter smiled ruefully. "Just one of those things time has to take care of. I'll be ok, but thanks for your concern. You know, I heard somewhere that the three greatest words aren't 'I love you' but 'Can I help?'"

She blushed. The phone rang and Cory answered it and held it out for her.

"Some man wants you, Marcie."

She took it, expecting the call to be from Jesse.

"You're going to kill yourself," the voice said.

She was at once both scared and angry. "And how am I going to accomplish that?" she snapped with false bravo.

"You're going to slice your wrists."

She laughed, but it was hollow. The caller started to say something more and then hung up instead.

Cory and Dexter didn't question her about the call, but they were

looking at her with curiosity.

SHE WENT HOME EARLY THAT NIGHT. THERE WAS A NOTE on the kitchen table. Jesse and Abigail had left and would be back in a few days. There was a casserole for her to put in the oven.

She decided to bathe while her meal was cooking. The house felt strangely large and empty.

She picked up the razor to shave her legs and studied it thoughtfully. The metal gleamed in the lights, especially the blade's sharp edge. She stroked it experimentally, wondering what its sharp edge would feel like if she were to draw it across her wrists deep enough to draw blood. Would it be an intense pain? A stinging bite? How long did it take for a person to bleed to death.

She dropped the razor when she realized the path her thoughts were following. Then she chided herself and fished the instrument from the water. Curiosity about suicide was far from actually committing the deed. And why would she be curious after the strange thoughts her phantom caller had planted in her mind?

As if on cue, the phone rang. She muttered angrily and snatched at a towel while she floundered from the water. The telephone shrilled persistently.

"I'm coming!" she shouted to it.

She grabbed the receiver on the eighth ring, sure that the person would hang up just as she answered.

"Please listen to me."

It was her caller from the suicide center.

Her hand tightened on the phone. "How did you get my number? Who gave it to you?"

"No one gave it to me — I just know. Like I know you're going to kill yourself."

Fear was replaced with anger. "I don't know why you're threatening me, but I'm not about to . . ."

"No — no, not a threat. I'm warning you. You're going to kill yourself." The voice was becoming frantic. "People think that knowing things is a gift, but it's a curse — knowing things that are going to happen. Seeing things. And not being able to do anything about it."

Panic rose to the surface. "Just leave me alone," Marcie hissed.

She slammed the phone down and then took it off the hook so the person couldn't call back. She was shaking with fear and the chill of the big house. She hurried to her bedroom and a warm nightgown.

Later, huddled in her bed with a thick blanket and the sounds of the night tucked around her, she thought back to the strange phone call.

She could tell the police, but in an eerie way, the man hadn't actually made a threat. The worst the calls could be termed was harassment and she doubted the police would take it too seriously. And some inner part rebelled against running for help if it wasn't necessary.

Her sleep was spotty and restless. She finally dressed shortly before dawn and pondered her problem over a cup of coffee. The next time the man called she would confront him — even threaten to call the police. That might scare him off. She felt better just from having arrived at a course of action.

THE SUN WAS TIPPING THE HORIZON, SLOWLY TAKING the chill from the air. She smiled and pulled open the back door. It was a perfect day to work in the garden.

She started transplanting seedlings from the hot house frames to neat orderly rows in the garden.

She had just patted a plant into place when the phone rang. She cursed, sure it was her caller and not wanting to leave her work, but wanting to make her rehearsed speech before she lost her nerve.

She ran and her foot slipped in a patch of dew soaked grass. She teetered, arms windmilling while she fought for balance. She managed to throw herself forward, arms out to break her fall.

She hit one of the seedling frames. Her hands broke through the glass and jammed between the sturdy wood frames. The wind was knocked from her and she lay sprawled, panting for air. When her breathing eased, she tried to rise and found her hands wedged tight.

She yanked and was rewarded with searing pain. Shock turned to disbelief and then fear. The glass had badly cut her hands and slashed both wrists. Blood flowed off her fingertips and began to pool around the plants in the soft dirt.

She whimpered and tried to pull free, but her hands were jammed too tight and the wood frame was too sturdy. Already she could feel her strength ebbing.

She began to scream for help, although she knew it was useless. Abigail and Jesse were gone and the house was isolated from traffic.

She began sobbing, tugging at her trap, each pull becoming more feeble than the last.

From the direction of the house, the phone rang.



There was a leak in the organization, and I was their number one suspect. I had to act fast — or be a dead man!

What You Don't Know

by WILLIAM I. SMITH

IT WAS A HOT, GRAY STEAM BATH OF A MONDAY MORNING, and I was padding around my condo barefoot, drinking coffee and sweating, trying to settle on a good enough reason for not going into the office when the phone rang. It was Sydney Riedell. He wanted me to come out to his house for one of our little talks. That woke me up.

"We have a problem, Charles," he told me after I had poured the usual drinks and we had settled ourselves comfortably in his old-fashioned study where the greenish glow from his desk top computer clashed with all that massive furniture.

"What problem do we have, Mr. Riedell?" I asked, feeling very much in need of the Bloody Mary I was sipping.

"Charles, I'll be frank with you," Riedell said. "There is a leak in our organization. The authorities are intercepting far too many of our shipments. Far too many."

"Oh?" I put my drink down very carefully. "Mr. Riedell, you realize I know absolutely nothing about that aspect of your affairs . . ."

"That's right, Charles; you handle the investment and redistribution

of much of my capital. But the point is, you could have access to other information if you applied yourself rather carefully. In fact that is exactly what some of my associates feel you have been doing."

"But there's no proof . . ."

"Charles, Charles." Riedell laughed and shook his head. "I trust you. Of course I do; but business is business. And as for proof . . . Well here is the situation, Charles. I have prevailed upon my associates to grant you forty-eight hours to find the source of our troubles. If you cannot do so, we will assume the source to be you and take . . . appropriate action."

"But, Mr. Riedell, that's . . . I'd . . ." I stopped. *But's and that's* don't cut it with Sydney Riedell. The less you said to him the better. You answered when he asked you; you did what he told you.

"Yes sir, Mr. Riedell," I said. "I'll get right on it."

"Very good, Charles. Now I suggest you stop wasting time." Riedell checked his watch. "But, of course, it *is* your time. Forty-eight hours, Charles; don't forget."

I wasn't likely to.

"SO WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO?" ASKED DISTRICT Attorney Michael J. Langlee.

It was three in the morning, still as hot as the inside of an oven, and we were sitting in the DA's Caddy, parked all alone in a little spot out by the airport where people come to watch the planes land.

"I was stuck," I said, passing back the bottle of brandy Langlee had brought along after I had called him a few hours ago. "I knew Riedell would have me watched. I probably could have gotten away — my running would have solved their problem as well as anything — but once I started I'd be running the rest of my life."

"So?"

"So, instead I started looking for Riedell's informer, not too discreetly. I'm afraid I gave a lot of different people the idea Riedell was distrustful of their loyalty. I think I've got things stirred up pretty good; so if you'll just watch for your opportunities, soon you'll be able to take a nice bite out of the organization."

"Hmmm." Thoughtfully Langlee slipped a little brandy. "So what do you want from me?" he asked finally.

"That nice new identity you promised me," I said. "You owe me."

"Do I now? As I recall you were the one who came to me when the IRS started shaking your tree. Said you could give me all sorts of useful information about Riedell's operations if I would get the tax boys off your case. I got them off your case, so doesn't that make us even?"

"A new identity *was* mentioned," I insisted. "You said you could get it for me through the Feds."

"Maybe," Langlee admitted. "But I'll need some hard facts first. Moonshine's all you've given me so far."

"Make up some hard facts for the Feds," I said. "I promise it'll work out."

"Sorry," Langlee said. "No facts, no new identity."

"Okay." I sighed. "We'll go to Plan B; but you won't like these facts. You'll be a lot better off not knowing them."

"How considerate of you." Langlee smiled and passed me the brandy. "Plan B, if you please."

"All right. moving around as much as I've been doing today, it didn't take me long to spot who was following me. Mickey Otto, one of Riedell's enforcers. Know him?"

"I know him."

"Not too well I hope. I killed him half an hour before I called you."

"What!" Langlee dropped the brandy bottle and didn't even bother looking for it. "You're telling me . . . And you want me to get you . . . you *are* crazy! Plain god damn crazy!"

"I told you you wouldn't like it. The rest is a little better."

"The rest of it! Jesus."

"I killed Mickey in front of Al Green's place. Just walked up to him nice and friendly and shot him before he had time to stop being surprised. Then I called Riedell and told him someone had killed Mickey. Next I phoned a few of the nice folks I'd been investigating all day and told them anonymously that Mickey was dead and Riedell thought they were responsible. That ought to start something, don't you think?"

"I . . . What I think," Langlee said very deliberately. "I think I'll arrest you for murder, that's what I . . ."

"Oh no," I said easily. "That way I'd be sure to involve you. I might even lie a little. An untrustworthy character like me, you can't tell . . . But if I get my new identity I won't say anything. For one thing I won't be here. For another, seeing as how I'm more involved than you, I'd hardly bring up the subject — unless someone mentioned it first."

LANGLEE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING FOR A LONG TIME. I slipped my hand into my coat pocket and watched him carefully, watched his face go doubtful, then harden briefly in disgust. Finally his mouth relaxed into reluctant acceptance.

"You got it," he said and fished around on the floor until he found the brandy bottle. He took a long drink and even made himself laugh.

"You get your god damn new identity, but that better be the last I ever see of you." Then he laughed again. "Crazy as you are, who knows, you might even have decided to round things off by killing me."

"Oh no." I smiled cheerfully and let go of the gun I'd quickly snatched from Mickey Otto's warm dead body. Instead I brought a handkerchief out of my pocket and began wiping the back of my neck with it. "What an idea!" I said. "What an idea."

That had been Plan C.

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

William I. Smith (*What You Don't Know*):

I am 52, single, hold degrees from The University of Denver, taught 12 years in The Denver Public Schools (as good a place to learn deviousness as any), and I have published a book and articles on education, confession stories, children's stories and articles, some light verse, and two mystery short stories. I enjoy reading, fishing and other outdoorsy things.

MYSTERY MINIQUIZ

Frank Smith and Bill Gannon were sidekicks to what TV policeman?

Sergeant Joe Friday.

In the comics, Lai Choi San was known better by what exotic name?

The villainess in "Terry and the Pirates," she was the Dragon Lady.

When not investigating real crimes as a detective with a major west coast police department, Paul Bishop is the editor of the critically acclaimed *Thieftaker Journals*. His short mystery fiction has appeared in numerous publications including *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*. Paul's first novel, *Shroud of Vengeance*, was published by Pinnacle Books earlier this year.

The Trenchcoat Files

by PAUL BISHOP

WORLD MYSTERY CONVENTION: Bouchercon 16 (named after mystery writer and critic Anthony Boucher) will convene on October 25, 26, and 27 for three days of panels, movies, book selling, book signing, awards, lectures, banquets, fellowship, and uncountable other mysterious going-ons. This year's Guest of Honor will be The California Crime Novel represented by authors Joe Gores, Joseph Hansen, and Colin Wilcox, with Tony Hillerman acting as Toastmaster. The site for the convention will be somewhere in the San Francisco area (a definite hotel had not been chosen at press time). Attending memberships are \$25.00 and supporting memberships \$10.00. For further information contact Brian Barrett, P.O. Box 6202, Hayward, California 94545.



GIDEON'S RETURN: Writing as J.J. Marric, the prolific John Creasey wrote twenty-one novels chronicling the adventures of Commander George Gideon of Scotland Yard, considered by many readers and critics to be among the best of Creasey's over 560 novels. With the current publication of *Gideon's Force* from Stein & Day, William Butler, using Creasey's J.J. Marric pseudonym, has brought the

methodical police Commander back to life for a new series of cases. If the response to the resurrection is anything like that to the revitalized James Bond, you can bet more investigations will follow.



MYSTERY & DETECTIVE MONTHLY: M&DM is without a doubt the best fanzine in current publication. All subscribers are encouraged to express their opinions, and, as a result, the pages are filled from cover to cover with letters from mystery writers, critics, and readers interested in all phases of the genre. The correspondence is laced with controversy, wit, insight into various phases of mystery writing and publishing, book reviews, and current mystery activities. A sample issue is \$2.00 from Bob Napier, Snapbrim Press, 14411-C South C Street, Tacoma, WA 98444.



SCIENCE FICTION MYSTERIES: For readers who enjoy a splash of the occult or the future mixed in with their mysteries there are two new titles from Space And Time Publications which should be of interest. The first is *The Spy Who Drank Blood* by Gordon Linzner featuring Blood, a vampire on the payroll of a top secret espionage network. Also available is *The Steel Eye* by Chet Gottfried, a hard-boiled tale about an armor-plated private eye in a world dominated by robots. Both books are \$5.95 each from Space And Time Publications, 138 West 70th Street (4-B), New York, NY 10023-4095.



THE FAN SCENE: Readers who enjoy the writing of Elizabeth Peters (a.k.a. Barbara Michaels) there is now a newsletter devoted to her works. To be put on the mailing list for *The Friends of Elizabeth Peters Newsletter* write to Mary E. Morman, 1802 Sanford Road, Silver Spring, MD 20902.

Simon & Simon fans are encouraged to send \$2.50 to Cynthia Shannon at 41951 Cherry Ave. #305, San Jose, CA 95118 for the current copy of *Details at 11*, a "comment, opinion, letter and information zine" devoted to the show.

Fan fiction, tied into such TV favorites as "Miami Vice," "The Wild Wild West," "Knight Rider," "Simon & Simon," "Airwolf," "T.J. Hooker" and others, is featured in *Southern Lights*, a multi-media fan-

zine from Ann Wortham, 1402 Allison Ave., Altamonte Springs, FL 32701 for \$5.00 plus a self-addressed-stamped-envelope (SASE).



HARDBOILED: PWA (Private Eye Writers Of America) member Wayne Dundee has taken the plunge into fanzine publishing with *Hard-boiled*, a new quarterly publication devoted to private eye fiction. Wayne and his associate Todd Moore plan to run articles, reviews, a letter column and two to three "hard hitting" pieces of fiction per issue. For information on the first issue (which should be available currently) send a SASE to Wayne at 903 #8 W. Jackson Street, Belvidere, IL 61008.



NATHANIEL DUSK P.I.: Author Don McGregor reports D.C. Comics will be publishing a sequel to his first successful Nathaniel Dusk mini-series published in late 1983. The new mini-series, *Apple Peddlers Die At Noon*, follows the further adventures of the clenched-teeth-tough, 1930's private detective through four issues beginning in July. Each issue will contain 52 pages of Don's story (which is top notch if the advanced copies are any indication) and art by Gene Colan. The book, which will sell in comics specialty stores for \$2.00 an issue, will also feature state-of-the-art printing processes to give the feature a unique look. Don McGregor's research for this project has been intensely in-depth, right down to the weather and news incidents which actually occurred during the time span of the story, and rings with it a gritty realism not to be missed.



TRIVIAL MYSTERIES: If you like to get involved in mysteries of your own check out the new *Trivial Detective Game* from the John N. Hansen Company. Created by the folks who brought you *221 B Baker Street*, *Trivial Detective* asks very hard questions but then provides a playing board where clues to the answers can be obtained.

Other new mystery games include the role playing *The Willing Dead* from Sleuths Inc. This is a party game, complete with invitations and mystery plot, created by the winners of the *Who Killed The Robins Family* mystery novel contest.

Sleuth Publications, creators of *The Sherlock Holmes Consulting*

Detective Game, also have a new product on the market in the form of *Jack The Ripper* in which two or more players try to outwit the scourge of Whitechapel before it's too late.



MYSTERY MOVIE UPDATE: Following the revival lead of the successful new *Kojak* TV movie, which aired earlier in the year, Raymond Burr will be returning to the small screen as Perry Mason in three two-hour movies for next season.

Bulldog Drummond will also be making a comeback when producer Tim Burrill (who has optioned all but two of the nineteen novels penned by Cyril, a.k.a. Sapper, McNiele) has finished updating the concept to James Bondian proportions and has located a rugged, but unknown actor to fill the role.

Disney is also getting into the mystery field with an animated version of *Basil of Baker Street* featuring the furry rodent resident of the famous (or famouse in this case) 221B Baker Street.

Both modern pulp heroes The Destroyer and The Executioner will have their derring-do transferred from written page to big screen during the next year. First out will be *Remo Williams and The Secret of Sinanju* featuring Fred Ward, Joel Grey and Kate Mulgrew as Warren Murphy and Richard Sapir's wisecracking, slightly off-center heroes.

The Executioner, whose exploits (including those yet to be written) have long been optioned by Burt Reynolds, will star Sylvester Stallone, who will also handle the rewriting chores on the already existing script.

Other mystery-related movies in various stages of progress are Frederick Forsyth's *The Forth Protocol* with Michael Caine, *Two Jakes*, the sequel to *Chinatown* with Jack Nicholson reprising his role as Jake Gittes, and *Defective Detectives* with Cheech and Chong as private eyes in Italy.

Please remember when writing to any of the sources mentioned to include a self-addressed-stamped-envelope with your correspondence if you wish for a reply.

Information for THE TRENCHCOAT FILES should be sent to
Paul Bishop, 31 Tahquitz Drive, Camarillo, CA 93010.

Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL

Ted Wood has now written three very good books in a row, which certainly establishes his credentials as one of the outstanding new talents in the mystery/suspense field. His new work *Live Bait*, once again features the entire police department of Murphy's Harbor, Ontario: Chief Reid Bennett and Sam, his wonderfully trained and intelligent German shepherd. Together they make up a splendid law enforcement team. This time they are in Toronto doing a little moonlighting in the security business. Since Bennett was once a cop in this city he knows it well and has contacts in the Police Department. Even though they are out of their jurisdiction, he and Sam take on a particularly nasty situation and resolve it in a thoroughly professional manner. A very readable and engaging book, well plotted, well written, and highly recommended. (Scribner's, \$12.95)

★ ★ ★

Sweet Justice by Jerry Oster must have been written before the widely publicized vigilante incident in the New York Subway, but the author had a very clear crystal ball. The death of a vicious punk on an IRT west side local is followed by a series of other murders. Assigned to the case are "Redford and Newman," a NYPD homicide team with an unbeaten record of arrests and convictions to its credit. In this fast-moving procedural a bitchy TV news star, a hot car stripper and a radical lesbian feminist are all done in as the case develops. Not all of the developments will please every reader, but the writing is gripping and the pace unrelenting as the two top cops close in on their prey. The solution is unconventional, but possible under the given circumstances. By any standard this is a gripping book that holds interest from start to finish. (Harper and Row, \$13.95)

★ ★ ★

A very important new work is *Detective and Mystery Fiction: an International Bibliography of Secondary Sources* by Walter Albert. This book has been needed for years, but until Mr. Albert appeared

there seemed to be no one willing and able to undertake its preparation. In almost 800 pages it contains a vast amount of information crisply and concisely listed and summarized. There is also a comprehensive index. The amount of work involved is staggering, and obviously exhaustive. In a work of this magnitude it would be a miracle if there were no errors, but a check of a number of very little-known publications proved the author correct on every occasion. As of now this is an indispensable reference for every general library and private collector of crime fiction. It is also a very strong candidate for an Edgar for outstanding scholarship. The publisher is Brownstone Books, 1711 Clifty Drive, Madison, Indiana 47250. The price is \$60.00, postpaid.

★ ★ ★

Anthea Cohen continues her saga of Nurse Carmichael in *Angel of Death*. In this episode Carmichael has been promoted within the hospital and she has fallen in love, but neither of these events has diminished her homicidal tendencies, or her remarkable ability to get away with it. This is a crime novel, but it is better regarded as a detailed character study of a middle-aged, physically ungifted woman who defeats her frustrations via homicide. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95)

★ ★ ★

As is to be expected, the prolific Edward D. Hoch has again prepared *The Year's Best Mystery and Suspense Stories*, this time for 1984. This is an important continuing series that provides an excellent selection of prime short stories in the mystery/suspense field. The author list is impressive and there are supplements listing the major prize winners of the year in the genre, a necrology, and an honor roll of outstanding works published during the year. Recommended, of course. (Walker, \$14.95)

★ ★ ★

Academy Chicago, a small but very effective publisher, has been bringing out Leo Bruce's Sergeant Beef mysteries in first American editions. The latest addition to the list, in hardback and with dust jacket, is *Case With No Conclusion*. This is a classic British mystery. Academy Chicago is at 425 North Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611. (\$14.95)

★ ★ ★

Another smaller publisher that should not be overlooked is the Foul Play Press that turns out high quality books at standard prices. The newest one is *Brandstetter & Others* by Joseph Hansen. This attractive volume offers five shorter works by Hansen including two that feature his homosexual private eye, Dave Brandstetter. These are not short stories, but longer pieces that reveal Hansen's acknowledged talents.

This is the sort of book that is likely to be selling at a premium in the collector market before too long. (The Foul Play Press, Woodstock, Vt. 05091. \$12.95)



An exceptionally good book is *The Quality of the Informant* by Gerald Petievich. This deals with the work of the United States Secret Service with a grim and gritty reality that leaps off the page. It should: the author is a veteran USSS agent who knows his field intimately and writes about it with exceptional skill. While he is not in the pioneering position of Hammett and Chandler, he is equally adept in taking the reader through the mean streets where crime is an unrelenting disease. Get this one while the first edition is still available. (Arbor House, \$14.95)



Faraday's Flowers by Tony Kenrick is billed as "A novel about an American guy and a China Doll." Well, not quite. It is largely about an extraordinarily talented Chinese prostitute in pre-World War II Shanghai whose techniques are graphically described. There is an American drifter involved who is searching for a legendary opium cache. The fact that he is fluent in Mandarin is his only asset as he tries to ferret his way into the Chinese underground with predictable results. Vivid and sexy, this is an interesting read, but it's not for missionaries. (Doubleday, \$14.95)



The rarified world of top level stamp collecting is explored in *The Dutch Blue Error* by William G. Tapply, the winner of the 1984 Scribner Crime Novel Award. Bostonian attorney Brady Coyne returns for his second adventure. His client is a very wealthy collector who owns the only stamp of its kind, until another copy shows up. Fakery is charged and we are off to the races. Stamp collectors will revel in this one; others will find it engaging and well plotted with enough twists to satisfy anyone. (Scribner's, \$12.95)



A.E. Maxwell, about whom the publisher has supplied scant information, is the author of *Just Another Day in Paradise*. In this instance paradise is California, not Hawaii (or better yet, Bali). Private eye Fiddler (so called because he plays the violin) is moneyed and living a life of comfort, with and without his sophisticated ex-wife, when he undertakes a case involving murder, high tech, and the attempt of hostile elements to smuggle electronic equipment into the Soviet Union. There are deaths by violence, sex, and a number of other elements before the case is resolved. This is a competent job, something like a

batch of cookies with lots of nuts and raisins stirred in. (Doubleday, \$14.95)

★ ★ ★

Marian Babson, who is a delightful American living in England, has come up with a novel idea. A British and an American family exchange houses for the summer. In *A Trail of Ashes* the author takes us to New England with the British family that encounters American culture with a jolt and also falls into the path of a pyromaniac. With her usual deft skill Miss Babson traces their adventures. In her next book, yet to come, she will report on what happens to the American family in England. (Walker and Co., \$12.95)

★ ★ ★

PAPERBACK NOTES: Robert Barnard's well praised *Death of a Mystery Writer* and *Death of a Perfect Mother* are now in paperback from Dell at \$3.75 and \$2.95 respectively . . . If you have missed Arthur Upfield, the brilliant Australian mystery writer, until now, by all means get *The Widows of Broome* and *The Mystery of Swordfish Reef* available in Scribner paperbacks at \$3.95 each . . . An Avon original that mixes murder, the theater, and academic life is P.M. Carlson's *Audition for Murder*. This appears to be the author's first book; another has been announced. \$3.50 . . . Also from Avon, a new horror story by Kenneth McKenney called *The Changeling* at \$4.50, which is a bit steep . . . A tongue-in-cheek private eye is Eddie Shoestring, currently being featured in a BBS series. The British network offers Shoestring in a paperback at \$3.50, obtainable from Parkwest Publications, Box A-10, Cathedral Station, New York 10025 . . . Penguin now offers William Murray's racetrack story, *Tip on a Dead Crab* and Orania Papazoglou's *Sweet, Savage Death* at \$3.50 each . . . Dell has Martha Grime's *The Dirty Duck*, a superior novel laid in Stratford-on-Avon for \$3.50. This is a most enjoyable mystery . . . Donald Westlake as Richard Stark offers *The Green Eagle Score* and *The Black Ice Score* in Avon paperbacks at \$3.50 each . . . Bantam has brought back Elizabeth Daly's well-known *The Book of the Lion* for \$2.95 while Scribner's has republished William Krasner's *Walk the Dark Streets* for a dollar more at \$3.95 . . . The fine series called Walker British Mystery continues to produce uniform paperback volumes at \$2.95. Authors represented this month include John Rossiter, Hugh McLeave, William Haggard, Jeffrey Ashford, and Gwendoline Butler.



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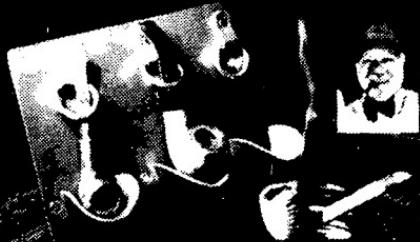
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